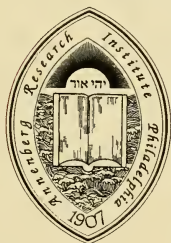




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Dear Sir:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 14th inst. regarding the matter mentioned therein. The same has been referred to the appropriate authorities for their consideration.

I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Yours truly,
[Signature]

Very truly yours,
[Signature]



Gf

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A

SERIES OF LETTERS

ON THE

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

(AS THEY FIRST APPEARED IN THE OCCIDENT.)

BY

BENJAMIN DIAS FERNANDES.



PHILADELPHIA
PUBLISHED AT 371 WALNUT STREET.
5614.

BT

1101

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1853

TO VANDERBILT
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PREFACE

BY THE EDITOR OF THE OCCIDENT.

IT is now fully thirty years when there appeared, in the city of New York, a monthly paper called "The Jew," and edited by Solomon Henry Jackson. The object of this work was to lay before the public arguments in defence of the Jewish religion, which was then, as now, assailed by the agents and messengers of the association calling itself, arrogantly, "The American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews." Mr. Jackson and his coadjutors fiercely assailed the popular belief, and occasionally their honest zeal hurried them into expressions which would have been stronger had they been conveyed in gentler tones. The work dragged along a painful existence for two years, and died with the spring of the year 1825, when the editor retired, having had sad experience enough of the public indifference towards his laudable undertaking. The number of Israelites, however, at that time in America, could not have exceeded *ten thousand*, if there were so many; hence it was naturally a difficult matter to support any denominational work, irrespective of the fact that Mr. Jackson had in all likelihood no acquaintance with general literature, and "The Jew" contained little besides controversial papers. Still it is a pity that it died so soon, with so little satisfaction to the originators, and probably with a loss more con-

siderable than the extent of his means permitted him to bear. In short, like with many similar undertakings, Mr. Jackson found out that journalism had more sorrows than pleasures for nearly all who engage in it; and for twenty years nearly, no attempt was made again to start a Jewish Journal in America.

One of the most attractive features of "The Jew," were the papers which appeared therein under the name of "Dea's Letters," of which seventeen had been printed when the work stopped. They were noticed for their cogency and gentlemanly tone, the arguments being not the less striking for the gentleness with which the author wielded his weapons. At that time, which was soon after my arrival in America, it was a fruitless task to discover who the writer was, as no one seemed able to give any information on the subject. Not long after, however, an old gentleman of Richmond, Virginia, where I then resided, the late Jacob Mordecai, informed me that a little before the commencement of the nineteenth century, persons connected with the Simson family, of New York, had in vain endeavoured to find a printer in Philadelphia to give publicity to a series of letters, probably the identical Dea's papers which had appeared in "The Jew."

In the meanwhile I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Sampson Simson, Esq., of Yonkers, New York; and when I had commenced "The Occident," in the month of April, 1843, and after the second number had appeared, I paid him a visit for the purpose of procuring the MS. of these letters, which I had ascertained were in his possession, intending to print the whole of them should my work survive sufficiently long. Mr. Simson was kind enough

to put the MS. in my hands, consisting of four books, covering in all about four hundred pages. I learned from him that, sometime before the American revolution, these letters had been loaned to his father, Solomon Simson, by a person to him unknown, and that they had been copied in the present MS. by Mr. Jacobs, a clerk, if I recollect aright, of Mr. S's father. More than this I did not learn.

On printing the first letter, in June, 1843, I at once suggested that the name of the author had been wrongly spelled in the MS., and should be *Dias* instead of *Dea*. Much to my gratification I received, soon after, a letter from the late lamented Grace Aguilar, informing me that I was right in my conjecture, and that the author's name was Benjamin *Dias*, her maternal great grand father, a merchant of Portuguese origin, who came from Jamaica to England, where he spent the latter part of his life, and where, in fact, these important letters were written. It appears, likewise, from her statement, that Mr. Dias wrote two copies of the work, one of which he gave to his eldest son, Isaac, and the other to his youngest son, Jacob. The latter, who was the grand father of Miss Aguilar, lent his copy to a relative, and it was never returned; and only some years back the descendants of Isaac, who reside in Jamaica, sent their copy to their aunt, the venerable widow of Jacob Dias, and it was greatly to the surprise of the family that they found the letters published in "The Occident" identical with those in their possession. Subsequently I ascertained that the other copy was in this country, the owner having proposed to me to have it stereotyped for general circulation; but having stipulated with him that he should bear the expense of publication, which his ample means would have readily enabled

him to defray, my letter remained unanswered. This person died some time ago, and an application through a friend in the South to his son-in law, who is not an Israelite, for a loan of the MS. to compare it with the one in my possession, was refused without assigning any reason. The English MS. neither has ever been in my hands; so I am unable to determine whether the present collection contains all the writings of Mr. Dias or not. Any how it embraces all I have ever seen, and it is given with strict fidelity, only that I have made the necessary corrections in orthography and punctuation, and occasionally, when absolutely requisite, I corrected a few errors made by the transcriber or the author; a procedure absolutely requisite with all manuscripts, even when one prints his own works.

I have ascertained, likewise, that the author's full name was Benjamen Dias Fernandes; and I regret that his relatives in England either know nothing more than what is given here, or that they did not care about communicating it for publication. Nor has any account ever reached me as to the reasons which induced Mr. Dias to write, or respecting the persons to whom they were addressed; but I rather think that nothing is known by his descendants on these topics, or else there can be but little doubt that Miss Aguilar would have informed me of them, as our correspondence for some years was quite familiar. If this conjecture be correct, Mr. Dias is but an addition to the many Israelites who have laboured well for their people, of whose history, nevertheless, we have nothing but their works.

It is possible that there may be other letters of Mr. Dias than those in this collection. But as it is my intention to take good care that Mrs. Aguilar, who still survives her

gifted daughter, shall see this book, it is to be hoped that she will communicate these, in case they do exist, to be made public hereafter.

The Israelitish reader has, accordingly, this work in his possession, after it has lain for nearly a hundred years either unpublished or scattered through the pages of "The Jew," and the "Christian Inquirer," a magazine edited by the late Barnabas Bates, of postage reform memory, in each of which a portion appeared, and "The Occident," in No. 3 of which the first letter was presented, and the dissertation on Genesis xlix. 10,* in No. 128, the whole publication occupying a space of ten and a half years. From the beginning these papers have been eagerly read by Israelites living scattered through the country; and they have furnished them many good opportunities to give convincing answers to those who assailed them on account of their faith. It was in obedience, therefore, to the request of many friends, that I announced, several months ago, my intention of issuing them in book form, and I am now happy that I have done so. It is to be hoped that the work will attract, as it deserves, the attention of all Israelites, especially of ministers and elders, that they may give it the widest possible circulation; as it is a sharp-edged sword of faith to ward off the attacks which are so frequently made, and which are not always so easily answered

* It is more than probable that Mr. Dias is not the author of the last mentioned paper, as it is headed in the MS: "Not being satisfied with the solution of this prophecy, as it is contained in the twenty-second letter, and having myself written a letter on the subject, (which I have hereunto annexed) I have made a few remarks in haste, which I here subjoin for the perusal of my friend." Whether, therefore, this is a subsequent remark of Mr. D., or originating with the transcriber, or some one else, is at present impossible to determine.

as some may suppose in their self-conceit. But these letters, if they are not always the best that can be advanced on a particular topic, at least give always a candid view of the question which they discuss, and in such a manner that their force cannot be easily weakened or avoided.

This is the first publication of mine which does not emanate from my pen; but then these letters passed successively under my review, and have a few, though but a very few, notes of mine appended to them; and I trust that I shall meet with so much encouragement as to induce me to issue hereafter more works of the kind, so that this may be "The Jewish Controversial Library, No. 1," as I had at one time thought to print on the title page. We owe it to ourselves to defend our religion; and it would be a shame if, with a free press at our command, we do not scatter light all over the land, and "teach the sons of Judah to wield the bow," the arrows of which slay unbelief and exterminate erroneous teaching.

ISAAC LEESER.

Philadelphia, { November 14th, 1853.
 { Marcheshvan 12th, 5614.

DIAS' LETTERS.

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR:—No distance between us shall hinder me, now having leisure, from satisfying your curiosity, and sending you my opinion concerning primitive Christianity, and the foundation on which it is established. I believe, when you required this task of me, you little thought of the trouble and pains I should be at; and I have no doubt, but you expected I should do this in about half a dozen letters. If so, you will find yourself greatly mistaken; for as the subject is extensive, you will find that the consideration of one thing will insensibly lead me to another. Your curiosity, I am afraid, will cost you dear, and you are likely to pay for postage more than perhaps any thing I can say will be worth.

I intend my letters on this subject shall be separate, that the thread of them may not be interrupted by any thing foreign to the purpose. I likewise intend to keep a copy, and to number them, and this is the first. By this means I shall be enabled, should there be any miscarriage, to transcribe another copy.

In the course of these letters I shall say, myself, as

little as possible; neither shall I assert any thing but under the authority of Scripture, or of some eminent authors. Of these there are three, (all in Spanish.) The first is "Fortificacion de la Fé," by Isaac, the son of Abraham, of whom take the following character from Basnage:* "It must not be denied," says he, "but that they had their defenders, at the head of whom we may rank Rabbi Isaac, the son of Abraham; this man declares that he spent his life in the courts of Germany, near princes, who often gave him marks of distinction; he had frequent conferences with Luther's disciples, and it was against them he composed his 'Buttress of Faith.' It must be confessed his book is one of the most dangerous that has been produced against Christianity. The author runs through the whole gospel, and dwells upon all the passages of the sacred story that can furnish him with any objections; he enforces them briskly, and at the same time refutes the Christian's answer." This book is translated into Latin under the title of "Munimen Fidei." "It were to be wished," adds Mr. Basnage, "the learned translator had followed this author, step by step, and confuted him." The author wrote it originally in Hebrew; the Spanish translator has added several notes and remarks of his own. The second is the famous "Tratado de la Verdad de la Ley," written by Saul Levy Morteria, of whom no doubt but you have heard. The third is "Prevençiones Divinas Contra La Vana Idolatria de las Gentes," by the learned Doctor Isaac Orobio de Castro, of whom Mr. Basnage makes mention.† This learned person had

* History of the Jews, B. 7, C. 30.

† Ibid.

a famous controversy with Limborch, concerning the Christian religion, which is published in Latin; but I very much doubt if the arguments on his side be fairly represented. In the manuscript which I have, there appears so much learning, solid argument, and sound judgment, that he must have been entirely qualified to support the advantages arising from his cause, besides his being well versed in all the doctrines of Christianity, and in their subtlety of subterfuges, which he continually exposes and explodes by his solid reasonings. These are the principal Jewish authors, who have written on controverted points, whose works are all in manuscript. I am indebted to some eminent Christian authors, who have supplied me with many hints, which I shall make use of occasionally; as what they assert must, when properly applied, give an additional strength to, and illustrate whatever I shall assert.

I shall take care to settle and fix the proper meaning of the terms, and to use them according to their true sense and signification; otherwise it will be impossible to avoid mistakes and confusion, as it happens when terms are made use of, or introduced, which have no determinate meaning, or have not proper ideas annexed to them; for how, otherwise, can we judge of the truth of any proposition? After all, I am very sure that the subject will suffer greatly in my hands for want of abilities equal to the task. For though I shall take care to assert nothing but such truths as I am convinced of, yet I cannot pretend to the happiness of being able to set them forth to you with that clearness which the importance of the subject requires; neither can I pretend, or you expect, that I should follow that method and regularity so necessary to be observed, and which oftentimes gives

additional light to a subject; and I assure you that nothing less than the pleasure which I always take in obeying you, together with a strong propensity, or desire in me, to search into these matters (for my own satisfaction and information) could induce me to undertake that which must expose my ignorance, and which I only do on the condition that you keep these letters private, and that you show them to no person whatever.

LETTER II.

How unfortunate is it that there should not be any authentic ancient writing of the transactions which are related in the New Testament, on the veracity of which we might depend. The disadvantage of being reduced to the necessity of taking every particular from such as were deeply engaged, and whose interest must naturally have led them to relate things which, perhaps, never happened, and many others in which they might be deceived, great as it is, is nothing (were there any certainty that the evidence of such authors is genuine) in comparison with what these writings have suffered, and the many alterations and additions they have received, and this to such a degree, that I dare say no learned man of the present day will be willing to assert of any one single text that it may not have undergone some change or alteration. Our first inquiry, therefore, must be into the authority of the New Testament; for no person can have the least right over our understanding, or demand our

assent to any proposition contrary to our conviction; and we may be sure that we cannot offend, when we make inquiry into the nature of the evidence produced for our conversion, since it is the only method we have to come at the knowledge of truth in any matter. Besides, in so doing, we avoid as much as possible the being imposed on, and act as reasonable creatures, and according to the dignity of our natures.

“God himself,” says the judicious Mr. Chandler, “who is the object of all religious worship, to whom we owe the most absolute subjection, and whose actions are all guided by the discerned reason and fitness of things, cannot, as I apprehend, consistent with his own perfect wisdom, require of his creatures the implicit belief of, or actual assent to any proposition which they do not, or cannot, either wholly or in part understand; because it is requiring of them a real impossibility, no man being able to stretch his faith beyond his understanding.”* Therefore, our inquiry into the nature of any proposition is absolutely necessary; particularly in matters offered for our conversion. And it is a very just observation of Mr. Basnage, when he says, “We must prove the divine authority of the Gospel (to the Jews) before we engage in the particulars of other controversies.”† And I add, till this is done, and the Jews admit the divine authority of the New Testament, nothing can be urged from it for their conversion; for, in controversies, neither party can, with the least shadow of reason, make use of any authority which is not admitted or granted by the other. A Mahomedan might as consistently urge the authority of the

* Introduction to his History of the Inquisition.

† History of the Jews, B. 7, C. 34.

Koran for the conviction of the Christian, as a Christian make use of or urge any thing from the New Testament for the conviction of the Jew. The absurdity of such a method in either case is equally plain and obvious; for, as the Christian does not admit the infallibility or divine inspiration of the Koran, what force or validity could any argument drawn therefrom have, or what regard would the Christian pay to any such authority? So, in like manner, what regard can it be expected the Jew will pay to any proof drawn from the New Testament, the authority or infallibility of which they do not admit? Can conviction be reasonably expected from such grounds?

By inspiration, I mean "God communicating his will, and exciting a person to publish, by writing, or proclaiming by words, such matters as are dictated to him." A person thus actuated, either in his writings or words, is properly inspired; and whatever he writes or says, under such circumstances, must be infallible or true; because, being under the immediate influence or guidance of God, he cannot be liable to error or deception. But the person, so actuated or influenced, must necessarily lose his own free agency; because he thereby becomes an instrument which God makes use of, under whose direction he acts; for otherwise he would not be infallible. Therefore, when I speak of the infallibility of any book or writing, I mean thereby that its author was under the circumstances afore-mentioned at the time of writing; for if he was not under these circumstances, then cannot his writings be infallible; because he, like other free agents, must be liable to deception, and may mistake the things concerning which he writes, or may impose upon others.

It is a doubt with me, whether there is any considerate person who believes in the infallibility of the New Testament. For no person will undertake to say that every word it contains was dictated by God to those who wrote it; and if they were not all dictated by God, then cannot the whole be infallible.

That every word could not be dictated by God is plain, from the contradictions it contains; and if only some part or parts of these writings should be thought infallible, such difficulties must necessarily arise in settling what part is so, and what part is not so, that it would be impossible to come to any tolerable agreement concerning it. And I am sure that nothing less than an inspired person could understand it; for otherwise there would be as many different opinions as persons employed in the work; and we should hear one person give as fallible what another asserted to be infallible.

Thus stands the case. Whoever now believes, or is persuaded of the divine inspiration or infallibility of the writings of the New Testament, must, I apprehend, have his evidence and conviction from one of the following means:

1. The immediate inspiration of the writer.
2. The immediate evidence of God's influence.
3. Immediate tradition from the inspired writer.
4. Distant tradition.
5. Education or authority.
6. Evidence arising from examination.

1. As to an immediate inspiration of the writer, or that evidence which the writer has, at finding himself, at the

time of writing, under the irresistible influence and immediate guidance of God, whose dictates he is forced to set down as an instrument, and (during the time) with the loss of his natural free-agency, the person thus influenced and excited may very consistently believe his writings to be inspired, and consequently infallible; because the circumstance in which he found himself at the time of his writing produced that conviction in *him*.

It is questionable whether those, who are so anxious to impress on others the infallibility of the writings of the New Testament, ever believed the writers thereof under the afore-mentioned circumstances; which they must necessarily do, otherwise their infallibility falls to the ground; but if they believed they were, I should be glad to know from what source their conviction arises; for I have not yet met with any thing to this purpose.

2. The next evidence, to that which the writer himself has, is when God is pleased to impress on, or influence the mind of a person by irresistibly forcing him, by some supernatural means, to believe such and such writings to be inspired. It is very certain that God may do this; but it is a question if He ever did; for no person did ever pretend to these supernatural illuminations, without being suspected by the more cool and sedate; and all pretending to such a gift never met with any credit from the most discerning, who generally ascribe it to a distempered imagination. However, they, like the writer, may very consistently believe such writings to be infallible. But, then, neither the writer or the person so influenced can be any evidence to me, unless I attain to the certainty of it by the same supernatural means.

3. Immediate tradition from the inspired writer.* This can be *to me* nothing but mere human fallible tradition; for if a person, whether really or pretendedly inspired, publishes a book or writing, and declares that it contains doctrines dictated by God to himself, his evidence to me is at least but human evidence, and therefore, uncertain and precarious: for if I believe it written by inspiration, it is on his own authority, which is both human and fallible. This being the case, how or in what manner shall I be able to distinguish the truly inspired writer from the imposter, who should pretend to the like privilege? And if we take the writers' words in all cases, or give heed to their own testimony, we shall be liable to be deceived and imposed on by every impostor or pretender to revelation; and the want of a certain criterion, I apprehend, was the occasion that in the first ages of the church so many different gospels appeared, which by many were received with veneration, while others rejected them as false and spurious: so that this immediate tradition can be no evidence at all of the divine inspiration or infallibility of any book or writing.

4. As to distant tradition, this evidence must be proportionably less the farther it is removed from the original; and if immediate tradition be but human fallible evidence, and a true revelation cannot by it be distinguished from a false one, how can it be the better ascertained by being more distant from the original tradition? for the farther it is removed the more it is weakened.

5. The evidence arising from education or authority, if it

* This influence must also take away the free agency of the object so *irresistibly influenced*, and, of a consequence, accountability also, as there can be neither reward nor punishment for doing that we are, as machines, impelled to do by the power irresistible.—ED. JEW.

proves any thing, proves that all the different books which give rise to the different religions in the world, are all inspired; for on this footing each person believes his to be so, and therefore, this can be no evidence at all.

6. Evidence arising from examination.—This is the only one to be depended on; but then it is entirely personal, and can never extend farther than the person who examines: that is, it may appear probable to me, on examination, that such a book was written under God's immediate influence and direction; but if a book appears to me to be probably divinely revealed, this is no reason why another person should believe the same, or that it should appear to him in the same light, unless he likewise find it to be so *on his own* examination.

LETTER III.

HAVING myself examined the writings of the New Testament, and likewise what is generally offered to support the opinion of their inspiration, I declare it to be altogether insufficient to me; for there does not appear any one circumstance, whether alleged by others, or contained in the writings themselves, sufficient to prove that either of the writers, at the time of writing, was under the unerring guidance or special influence of God. Besides, there is not in all the gospels any one expression intimating any such thing; neither do the writers thereof lay any claim, or in the least pretend to any such privilege or authority; nor indeed could such a prerogative be consistently ever allowed

them; for if every one of them at the time of writing, had been under the immediate guidance of God, they would, in this case, all have given us the very same account of things, without the least difference or variation; for it is impossible, if God dictated to them all the same history, that any variation or difference should be found, unless it could be supposed that God could dictate different facts in different histories of the same person. But that there are frequent contradictions is evident.

From this circumstance, and many others, I conclude that the writers of the New Testament could not be under the infallible guidance of God; neither do I find that they published or gave out their writings as such. And if they did not declare themselves inspired, what authority or foundation could any one else have to declare them so? On the contrary, it very evidently appears that there were no writings deemed canonical in what is called the first ages of Christianity, but the Old Testament! The famous Dodwell says, “ We have at this day, certain most authentic ecclesiastical writers of the times, as Clemens Romanus, Barnabas, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarpus, who wrote in the same order wherein I have named them, and after all the writers of the New Testament, except Jude and the two Johns, but in Hermas you will not find one passage, nor any mention of the New Testament; nor in all the rest is any one of the Evangelists named; and if sometimes they cite any passages like those we read in our gospels, you will find them so much changed, and for the most part, so interpolated, that it cannot be known whether they produced them out of our, or some other apocryphal gospels; nay, they sometimes cite passages which most certainly are not in the present gos-

pels."* The first who wrote is Matthew, but at what time he did write is uncertain; some fixing his date at one time, and some at another. Again, some think he composed his gospel in the Hebrew or Jerusalem dialect; for it seems the very language he wrote in is uncertain; and it is confessed on all hands that no account can be had of the original; so that if he wrote in this language, it has disappeared, but how or in what manner nobody knows. And what is still more extraordinary, the Judaizing Christians (for whose use it is said he wrote) had a gospel under his name, but its authenticity was not admitted by the other sects; not because they found, on comparing it with the original, that it was corrupted, (for this they could not do for want of the original,) but because it differed from or was contradictory to the many other spurious gospels which they had received, or to the opinion which the majority of that council which settled the canon had embraced. But what will appear still more surprising to you, is that the Christian should offer to the world for acceptance, as inspired and infallible, a Greek version, which is the one now existing, and which most people mistake for the original of Matthew's gospel, without any person's comparing this version with the original, or indeed without knowing any thing either of the original or the author of the version. Should they not, in an affair of such importance, and before they pretend to fix on it the stamp of infallibility, be certain that it was at least a true version? But nothing of this kind is done, which appears to me such a proceeding as nothing can justify.

They are not wanting, however, in giving it all the authority that possibly can be given to it; and for this pur-

* Dissert. 1. In Iren.

pose, and with this intention, some ascribe the version to St. Matthew himself; others ascribe it to St. James, bishop of Jerusalem; others to St. John; others to St. Paul; others to St. Luke; others to St. Barnabas; and others again ascribe the translation to the joint labour of all the Apostles; so that the ascription to some one or other, or all of the Apostles, proves nothing but their ignorance in this important matter; and their uncertainty and disagreement prove how little dependence ought to be placed on it, and their manifest intention of imposing on the weak and credulous.

But can people be so serious in persuading others to admit as infallible, the version of a book, without any knowledge of the original, or without knowing whether it be a true version, or without any certain knowledge of the person who made this version? For should it be admitted that St. Matthew did write a gospel, how are we to know, or how can it be ascertained, that the version we now have, is from the original, or that it is a true and faithful one? This we know, that in the last century an Armenian translation was discovered, which a doctor of the Sorbonne thought to be of great antiquity, and was of opinion that it might be very useful in correcting the Greek text. This shows that they do not think it infallible, for if it were, it would require no human correction.*

Of as little authority, or rather less, if possible, is the gospel under the name of Mark. Some take this Evangelist to be the disciple of Peter, and his interpreter; others take him to be the same as John Mark, mentioned in the

* See all the particulars in Calmet's Dictionary on the word Matthew.

Acts; some think him to have been a priest, while others say he was Peter's nephew. And as regards the gospel, some take him to be the author of it, while others ascribe it to Peter; others have it that he wrote from what he heard from Peter by word of mouth, in his lifetime; others say that Peter dictated it to him; while others affirm that it was written after Peter's death.

The same difference of opinion we find in respect to the place where it was written; for while some affirm it to have been written at Rome, others affirm it to have been written in Egypt. "All these different sentiments," says our author, "are enough to prove that the circumstances of time and place are uncertain, when and where St. Mark composed his gospel. Men are as much divided as to the language it was written in; some saying it was composed in Greek, and others, in Latin;"* and I add that these different sentiments evidently prove that they know nothing concerning its infallibility, or the inspiration of its author. It rather appears much more probable, (which, indeed, is generally believed,) that this gospel is no more than an abridgement made from Matthew; and then it will signify but little who the author was, where, when, or in what language he wrote. "For," says the aforesaid author, "as far as may be judged by comparing the gospel of St. Mark with St. Matthew's, the first is an abridgement of the second. St. Mark very often uses the same terms, relates the same facts, and takes notice of the same circumstances." So that, let it be an original or an abridgement, its infallibility cannot be proved, and, therefore, can be of no authority.

The third Evangelist is Luke, who, as he declares in his

* Calmet on the word Mark.

Preface or Introduction to his Gospel, wrote only by hearsay, and according to information given him by others, and makes not the least pretension to supernatural illumination or information; neither does he pretend to be an original evidence of the facts which he relates: so that it will be hard to say how infallibility came to be ascribed to his writings; for it was even impossible for him ever to vouch for the truth of the facts which he relates; nor could his evidence be admitted in any court of law or justice. I cannot here forbear noticing how useless and how little known must the Gospels, which were published, have been, when the writer or author of one, knew not of the publication or writings of the others, as is plainly demonstrable from the following facts:—Matthew published his Gospel many years before Luke; yet when Luke published his, he takes no notice of Matthew's; for it is certain he thought no Gospel authentic when he wrote; for if he had, he would not have been under the necessity of collecting his materials from others, having an infallible guide in Matthew; so that either he knew not that Matthew had written an infallible relation of those facts, or he confounds the Gospel of Matthew amongst the spurious ones that were abroad in those days; none of which he admitted as true and authentic.

Now, how a person of Luke's character should be ignorant of the infallibility of Matthew's Gospel; or how, if he was not ignorant of it, he should not make use of it, or send it to his friend, rather than his own, is what I confess I cannot comprehend.

“The Gospels,” says a famous author, “continued so concealed in those corners of the world where they were written, that the latter Evangelists knew nothing of

what the preceding wrote, otherwise there could not have been so many apparent contradictions, which, almost since the first constitution of the canon, have exercised the wits of learned men. Surely if St. Luke had seen that genealogy of our Lord which is in St. Matthew, he would not himself have produced one wholly different from the other, without giving the least reason for the diversity; and when in the preface to his Gospel he tells the occasion of his writing, which is, that he undertook it from being furnished with the relation of such as were eye-witnesses of what he writes, he plainly intimates that the authors of those Gospels which he had seen were destitute of that help; so that neither having seen themselves what they relate, nor consulted with diligence and care such as had seen them, their credit was, therefore, dubious and suspected; whence it must necessarily follow, that the writers of those Gospels which Luke had seen, were not at all the same as our present Evangelists."*

To the foregoing observations I shall only add, that there are the same doubts as to his person and character, profession and writings, as the others; for it is not certainly known whether he was a Jew or a heathen, a physician or a painter; and as to his Gospel, some think it properly St. Paul's, whilst others say, that Luke only digested what St. Paul preached to the gentiles; and others again, that he wrote with the help of St. Paul.†

The last is St. John;—and it is plain that he wrote with the intention of establishing the divinity of Jesus, which particular is not contained in the Gospels then extant; he,

* Dodwell Dissert. in Iren.

† For particulars, see Calmet on the word Luke.

for this reason, goes on a very different plan from the other Evangelists. "His principal care in this undertaking," says Calmet, "was to relate such things as might be of use in confirming the divinity of the son; and to this purpose says many things which the others are silent on, and omits such matters in which the others are very particular, and which are reckoned very principal and necessary in the history. Thus, considering his very great care and tenderness for Mary, the mother of Jesus, he does but little honour to her memory, in not relating those most remarkable and wonderful transactions mentioned by Matthew and Luke, (though with a wide difference,) concerning the miraculous conception of Mary, and the birth of Jesus. And as Mary continued to live with him from the time of Jesus' death, surely he must have had many opportunities of informing himself of those extraordinary affairs, from her own mouth, with much more certainty than the others; for it must be thought very extraordinary that the Evangelist, under the circumstances aforementioned, should make no mention at all of such an essential article as the most wonderful conception of a virgin, and the birth of the person who was the subject of his history. How far his neglect of relating so important a matter, and likewise those extraordinary dreams and visions which the others mention, weakens the authority of their relation, or of his own, I shall not determine; but certain it is, that his Gospel met not with that reception which one would think was due to a person of his authority, for many rejected his Gospel; the Alogians in particular though they admitted the three others, yet rejected this; and others believed a heretic was its author, one Cerenthus; and no doubt but the difference in the point of doc-

trine might be the occasion of it, or the want of sufficient evidence of his being the author."*

The difficulties which must arise from the aforesaid considerations, are such, in respect to the proof of the inspiration or infallibility of the Gospels, as cannot be got over; and yet this is not all; for whoever is in any way acquainted with the history of the ancients, and the observations of the moderns, must be convinced of the many additions, alterations, and interpolations, which the writings of the New Testament have undergone, of which I shall collect some accounts for your information.

LETTER IV.

THERE was not any one sect but complained of interpolations and additions made to the Gospels; nay, some sects or parties went so far as to reject some one or other of the Gospels, now received as canonical,—and others the whole of the New Testament.† Eusebius states the story of the woman taken in adultery to be only in the Gospel according to the Hebrews; and consequently must have been inserted after his time into the Gospel of St. John; and St. Jerome declares, that in his time the story was only to be found in some copies. Both St. Jerome and St. Austin complain of the great variety of the Latin copies of the Evangelists, and how widely they differed from each other;‡

* See Calmet on the words John and Gospel.

† Eccles. Hist. lib. iii. c. 39.

‡ See Calmet on the word Bible.

and they likewise declare the same difference in the Greek copies. St. Ambrose says of the Greek copies that they were so different as to give rise to many controversies among them; (and these different copies must as naturally have occasioned different opinions and doctrines.) St. Jerome asserts that he found as many different versions as books.* Now as there could not be any possibility of distinguishing the true copy or version (had there been one,) so every one followed that, which either suited with his interests or opinions; and to this end, every one added, omitted, or altered whatever he thought most conducive to his purpose.

Origen says, "We found great difference in the copies, and made use of what was convenient out of the Old Testament, making use of our judgment in such things, as out of the Seventy seemed doubtful, and were not to be found in the Hebrew; and in other things, inserting and making up the deficiency from the Hebrew." Thus did every one insert whatever he thought necessary, or agreeable to his opinions; and every one made use of that copy which best suited his notions. Thus Grotius declares he made use of the Vulgate; because the author delivers no opinions contrary to the faith.† Now if liberty has been taken of correcting, interpolating and altering the New Testament, what person is there who can assert and prove that these are the genuine writings of those persons whose names they bear? If it should be said that this was done only in matters of small importance, I ask, what certainty have we, that any thing was left untouched? Surely those that found means

*Vide ib. on the word Vulgate.

† Grot. Pref. Annot. suas in Vet. Test.

of interpolating and inserting whole passages, would rather do it in things which in their own conceit, were of greater consequence, and which they might do either by the omission, transposition, or addition of a word, the which might contribute towards maintaining their different doctrines, more especially in such affairs, as in their opinions concerned salvation, should such a procedure confer authority on them, than in things either of small or no importance. And this was no doubt the cause which gave rise to the many different copies, not only of the four Gospels which they now have and receive as canonical, but likewise to the many other Gospels, which were received by the different parties, without there being any possibility of knowing the true from the false—if indeed, any of them were true; for they could have no other criterion, than as the copies they did receive agreed more or less with their different systems of faith. And for this reason alone were the four Gospels we now have preferred, or made authentic, rather than those rejected as spurious; for it is certain no authority appeared in these above the others. “The ancient heretics,” says Calmet, “began generally with attacking the Gospels in order to maintain their errors, or excuse them; some rejected all the genuine Gospels—(that is, those which the councils declared such)—and substituted such as were spurious in their room; others have corrupted the true Gospels, and have suppressed whatever gave them any trouble, and have inserted what might favour their erroneous doctrines.”

Thus the Nazareans corrupted the original Gospel of St. Matthew, and the Mercionites mangled that of St. Luke, which was the only one they received. The Alogians, seeing their condemnation too plainly declared in St. John, re-

jected him, and admitted only the three other Evangelists. The Ebionites rejected St. Matthew, and received the three other Gospels. The Cerinthians acknowledged only St. Mark; and the Valentineans St. John only.* In Origen's time, Celsus exclaims against the liberty which Christians (as if they were drunk, says he) took of changing the first writing of the Gospel, three, four, or more times.† The Manicheans showed other scriptures, and denied the genuineness of the whole New Testament. Faustus, their bishop, says, "You think that of all the books in the world, the Testament of the Son only, could not be corrupted; and that it alone contains nothing which ought to be disallowed, especially when it appears it was neither written by himself, nor his apostles, but a long time after, by certain obscure persons, who, lest no credit should be given to the stories they told, did prefix to their writings partly the names of the apostles, and partly of those who succeeded the apostles,—affirming that what they wrote themselves was written by these, wherein they seem to have been more injurious to the disciples of Christ, by attributing to them what they wrote themselves, so dissonant and repugnant,—pretending to write those Gospels under their names, which are so full of mistakes and of contradictory relations and opinions, that they are neither coherent with themselves, nor consistent with one another."‡ Again, the same bishop says, "Many things were foisted by your ancestors into the Scriptures of our Lord which, although marked with his name, agree not with his faith."§ The learned Dr. Mills gives an account

* Calmet's Dictionary on the word Gospel.

† Origen lib. ii. Contra Celsus.

‡ Augustin Con. Faustus, lib. xxxii. c. 2.

§ Lib. 33. c. 3.

of a general alteration of the Gospels, so low down as the sixth century.* He likewise with great labour collected and published all the readings of the New Testament, which are so different and various, that the learned Doctor Whitby declares, that "The vast quantity of various readings collected must of course make the mind doubtful or suspicious, that nothing certain can be expected from books where there are various readings in every verse, and almost in every part of every verse."† Mr. Gregory, of Christ church, in Oxford, declares, that "There is no profane author whatever, *cæteris paribus*, has suffered so much by the hand of time as the New Testament has done."‡ How willing and ready the priests have been at all times to encourage pious frauds, and continue impositions on the credulity of the ignorant, need not be mentioned. One fact, however, I cannot pass in silence, and that is a letter of Cardinal Belarmine, who with the other divines attended the correction of the Vulgate, in which he acknowledges that there are still several faults, which, for good reasons, the correctors did not think proper to remove.§ I shall make no remark on this passage, but shall proceed to a short account of the rest of the writings of the New Testament.

And first—the book of Acts, which is said to be the work of St. Luke, was rejected by many, particularly the Marconites and Manicheans; many others described the acts of the apostles, yet were they rejected,|| for the same

* Mills' Prolegom. p. 98. † Whitby's Exam. Var. Lect. Milli. p. 3, 4.

‡ Preface to his posthumous works.

§ Calmet's Dict. on the word Vulgate.

|| Calmet's Dic. on the word Acts.

important reason that this was received, that is, because it agreed better with the doctrines in vogue than the others. St. Chrysostom complains that this book was little known, and that the reading of it was much neglected, which shows that even in his time it was not held in any degree of authority. In this book St. Paul cites a saying of Jesus,* which is not to be found in any of the gospels; so that either he had this passage out of some spurious gospel, or it has been left out of the present copies since his time. Concerning the authority and genuineness of the epistles, there have been many debates, and I think all have been doubted and rejected by some party or other, and this for the same important reason above mentioned, according as they either agreed or disagreed with the doctrines and opinions embraced by the different sects; particularly St. Paul's epistles to the Hebrews, the epistle of James, the second epistle of St. Peter, the second and third epistles of St. John, and the epistle of Jude. But as the inspiration of all or either of them can never be proved, I shall say nothing concerning them, but refer you for a more particular account of them to Calmet.†

As to the authority of the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelations, as its author cannot be ascertained, how is it possible that its inspiration should? For "Caius, priest of the Church of Rome, who lived at the end of the second age, seems to assure us that the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelations, was written by the arch-heretic Cerinthus; and Deonylas, Bishop of Alexandria, says, that some indeed thought Cerinthus to be the author of it, that for his own

* Acts xx. 35.

† On the different articles, and word Apocryphal.

part, he believed it to be written by a holy man named John, but he would not take upon himself to affirm that it was really the work of the apostle and evangelist of that name. The Apocalypse, has not at all times been owned to be canonical. St. Jerome, Amphilocus, and Sulpitius Severus remark, that in their time there were many churches in Greece that did not receive this book.”*

On the whole, the writings of the New Testament appear to me so far from being infallible, or written under the immediate guidance and influence of God, that I am surprised how it is possible that any persons should make them the foundation or basis of their religion; for the contrary most evidently appears; and they are even destitute of proof that they were written by the persons whose names they bear; nor, indeed, does it appear that those persons ever wrote any thing themselves. This uncertainty, together with the continual alterations they have undergone, makes it impossible to credit them even as historians. Moreover, it appears highly improbable that any of the writings we now have, should be the genuine works of the apostles; because, had this been the case, they would have published them as such, and nobody could have refused them; for they would then have been received by all without contradiction, as every person had it in his power to have satisfaction concerning their genuineness from the apostle who published them: the contrary of all this is very evident. Besides, common and usual facts, such as may happen in the common course things, may, and do generally receive credit on the evidence of the historian;

* Calmet on the word Apocalypse.

but it would not be the same, were he to relate things out of the common course of probability, or what appeared improbable; for the more extraordinary the facts are which he relates, the more extraordinary ought the evidence to be. But this evidence is nowhere to be had but in these writings themselves, which is no evidence at all, they being destitute of proof, and therefore cannot be admitted or allowed.

The only thing which seems probable to me from the account transmitted to us, is, that there were many who wrote; and, in order to give a greater repute to their writings, they published them under the names of such persons as would give them a greater degree of authority; and, as these writings contained different facts and doctrines, very opposite and contradictory to each other, so every one chose, and made use of such or as many gospels as he pleased or liked best. As these gospels were in private hands, the possessors did not want for opportunities of changing, interpolating, adding, and curtailing whatever they thought convenient, or was agreeable to the opinions which they had embraced. Under these circumstances, it was impossible to have known the true gospel of either of the apostles, had there been any; because it could have no mark of authority, and the true one must have suffered equally with the false; for had there been any mark or criterion by which the true might have been distinguished from the false, every one would have received it. So that it is plain, either that the apostles did not publish any gospels, or that they fared no better than those which were published by others, and were confounded with them.

It likewise appears to me, that the authors and transcribers thought of nothing else but inserting and relating

surprising and marvellous events, such as would astonish and catch the credulity of the vulgar, and also such things as best suited with their prejudices and purposes; for it seems improbable that the apostles, whose labours and sufferings are always represented as proceeding from their love of mankind, and care of their salvation, should be the authors of the writings we now have under their names, which have caused such disputes, discord, hatred, disorders, troubles, grievous persecutions, and even wars and desolations—and all this occasioned by these very writings; for every party authorizes its doctrines and its proceedings by them. Surely, if they were such persons as they are represented to be, they never would have published or authorized any thing like it, unless they were determined literally to fulfil the saying recorded of Jesus—"Think not that I am come to send peace upon earth; I come not to send peace, but a sword;"* which sword has been drawn from the beginning, and which Christians have taken care not to sheath. It is well for the doctrine of the infallibility of these writings that the Christian laity or bulk of mankind, take it on trust, and that few, very few, take any pains, or make inquiry concerning the evidence of their inspiration and infallibility; and that those who actually make such inquiry are disposed or concerned, either through interest or policy, not to publish their thoughts respecting this matter, contenting themselves with keeping their discoveries secret; for, were the infallibility or inspiration of any writings contrary to these to have no better foundation, how would they publish their arguments against them, and expose their insufficiency!

* Matth. x. 34.

LETTER V.

OUR next inquiry is, first, who were the persons that met in council to establish a new canon? and secondly, what authority they had for so doing.*

As to the first question, they plainly appear to have been a set of men entirely unqualified for such an undertaking; for from the best authority we may collect that a majority in these councils was always formed by faction and intrigue; that the members were led by interest, prejudice, and passion; and that they were contentious, ambitious, ignorant, and wicked. The judicious Mr. Chandler gives such a character of the Fathers, such a description of all general councils, as must be very convincing how improper they were, and what little authority their determinations ought to have. I shall therefore transcribe a few passages from him

As to the Fathers he says, "It is infinite, it is endless labour to consult all that the Fathers have written; and when we have consulted them, what one controversy have they rationally decided? how few texts of Scripture have they critically settled the sense and meaning of? how often do they differ from one another, and in how many instances from themselves? Those who read them, greatly differ in their interpretation of them, and men of the most contrary sentiments all claim them for their own. Atha-

* The Council of Laodicea was the first that established the new canon; it met towards the end of the fourth century.

nasians and Arians, all appeal to the Fathers, and support their principles by quotations from them. And are these the venerable gentlemen, whose writings are to be set up in opposition to the Scriptures? are creeds of their dictating to be submitted to as the only criterion of orthodoxy? or esteemed as standards to distinguish between truth and error? Away with this folly and superstition! the creeds of the Fathers and Councils are but human creeds, that have marks in them of human frailty and ignorance."*

Another eminent person declares himself thus: "The Fathers, you say, whom you regard as the propagators of the Christian religion, must necessarily have been men of true piety and knowledge; but it has been maintained and proved to you by a great number of instances, that the Fathers have not only fallen into very gross errors, and been most profoundly ignorant of many things which they ought to have known; but farther, that most of them have more or less suffered themselves to be led by passion; so that their conduct has been found frequently to be such as is neither regular nor justifiable." Again, "In the first ages of Christianity, and those that followed after, the men most applauded, and who bore the greatest character in the church, were not always those that had the greatest share of good sense, or were the most eminent for learning and virtue."†

As to general councils, "I think it will evidently follow from this account," says Mr. Chandler, "that the determinations of councils and decrees of synods as to matters

* Introduction to the History of the Inquisition, p. 111.

† Barbeyr. Hist. and Critical Account of the Science of Morality, chap. x. See the whole chapter, as likewise the 9th.

of faith are of no manner of authority, and carry no obligation upon any Christian whatsoever. I will mention here one reason, which will be itself sufficient, if all others were wanting; viz., that they have no power given them in any part of the gospel revelations, to make these decisions in controverted points, and to oblige others to subscribe to them; and that therefore the pretence to it is an usurpation of what belongs to the great God, who only has and can have a right to prescribe to the conscience of men. But, to let this pass, what one council can be fixed upon that will appear to be composed of such persons, as upon impartial examination can be allowed to be fit for the work of settling the faith, and determining all controversies relating to it? I mean, in which the majority of the members may in charity be supposed to be disinterested, wise, learned, peaceable and pious men? Will any man undertake to affirm this of the Council of Nice! Can any thing be more evident, than that the members of that venerable assembly came, many of them, full of passion and resentment; and others of them were crafty and wicked; and others ignorant and weak? Did their meeting together in a synod immediately cure them of their desire of revenge, make the wicked virtuous, or the ignorant wise? If not, their joint decree as a synod could really be of no more weight than their private opinions, nor perhaps of so much; because it is well known that the great transactions of such an assembly are generally managed and conducted by a few; and that authority, persecution, prospect of interest, and other temporal motives, are commonly made use of to secure a majority. The second general council were plainly the creatures of the Emperor Theodosius, all of his party, and

convened to do as he bid them. The third general council were the creatures of Cyril, who was their president, and the inveterate enemy of Nestorius, whom he condemned for heresy, and was himself condemned for rashness in this affair. The fourth met under the awe of Emperor Marcian, managed their debates with noise and tumult; were formed into a majority by the intrigues of the Legates of Rome, and settled the faith by the opinions of Athanasius, Cyril, and others. I need not mention more; the farther they go the worse they will appear. As their decisions in matters of faith were arbitrary and unwarranted, and as the decisions themselves were generally owing to court practices, intriguing statesmen, the thirst for revenge, the management of a few crafty interested bishops, to noise and tumult, the prospects and hopes of promotions and translations, and other like causes, the reverence paid them by many Christians is truly surprising.*

“All the world saw,” says M. Barbeyrac, who quotes an author who cannot be suspected of any ill-will towards the Fathers, “the dreadful cruelties that were committed in these unhappy centuries: they maintained sieges in their monasteries; they battled in their councils; they treated with the utmost cruelty all whom they but suspected to favour opinions, which too often proved to be such as nobody understood, not even those that defended them with the greatest zeal and obstinancy.” “These,” says he, “are the great lights of the church! these are the holy Fathers whom we must take for men of true piety and knowledge.”†

“One council,” says another historian, was summoned to

* Introduction to the Hist. of Inquisition, sec. iii. p. 100 to 102.

† Historical Acc. of the Science of Morality, sec. x.

annul what another had done, and all things were managed with that faction, strife and contention, as if they labored to quench the spirit of meekness and brotherly love, so often recommended in the gospel. Some were banished, some were imprisoned, and against others they proceeded with more severity, even to the loss of their lives.”*

As to the second inquiry, “What authority they had to establish a new canon?” I should say that no other appears to me but their own; which, considering what sort of men they were, will never be allowed to be any authority at all; they produced none from Jesus, none from the apostles, neither had they any given but those very writings. They had no criterion by which they could distinguish among the variety of books that were then in the world under the name of the apostles, (if any were truly theirs,) which were so, and which not: and we do not hear a word of the least pretensions to any extraordinary assistance or revelation to this council from God; so that the authority which they imposed on these writings appears to have been entirely accidental, and to have depended upon their having a majority in their favour. This, I think, is most that can be said of them, and the same might or would have befallen any of those writings which were rejected as spurious, had the majority of the council consisted of a contrary party; but what authority the opinion of the majority of any council, acting under the influence and motives before mentioned, can have, is what every person must determine for himself.

* Echard, Rom. Hist. Vol. iii. p. 57.

LETTER VI.

I REMEMBER having read, but in what author I cannot at present recollect, that in a controversy between a Christian and a Jew, the latter made several objections to the authority of the New Testament, to which the other, not being able to clear them up, returned this remarkable answer: "The authority or divine inspiration of the New Testament was as well grounded as that of the Old; and that there was no objection which could be made to the New Testament, which might not with equal propriety be made to the Old."

I think there cannot be a greater instance of distress, or rather despair, than when a disputant, rather than yield, is obliged to give up the very principles on which alone he can support his cause. A fine method this to convince the Jews of the authority of the New Testament, and at one stroke to silence them. But if Christians have no other arguments to establish its authority, we may declare they never will be able to work their conversion; for how can a Christian consistently call himself by that name, unless he admits the authority of the Old Testament? since, if he gives that up, must he not give up his religion at the same time also? It is of such who, notwithstanding, would be thought Christian, that an author very judiciously observes, "If they really imagine that Christianity hath no dependence on Judaism, they deserve our tenderest compassion, as being plainly *ignorant* of the very elements of the religion they profess."*

* Warburton's Divine Legation, Vol. i. B. I. Sect. 1, p. 6.

They must therefore admit as a postulatam, its authority; for was not the Old Testament cited by the apostles for every thing they pretended to prove? and is it not the Old Testament which they pretend is fulfilled in the New? Can persons, then, pretend to be Christians, on rational principles, without admitting the authority of the Old Testaments? Can they either deny or lessen its authority? Therefore, there needs not any proof from us to Christians for the authority of the Scriptures called by them the Old Testament; to produce any, would be both labour and time lost, because they must admit its authority, or they cannot be Christians. The case of the Jews, in respect of the authority of the New Testament, is quite another thing; and this they must all know and acknowledge.

Besides, they well know the doubts which subsist concerning the books of the New Testament. The learned Doctor Beveridge says: "No one can be ignorant that some of the truly canonical books of the apostles were doubted of, in the three first centuries of Christianity."* And again, "Amongst all the more ancient writers of ecclesiastical matters, you will hardly find two that agree in the same number of canonical books."† "The writers of those times," says the famous Dodwell, "do not chequer their works with texts of the New Testament, which yet is the custom of the moderns, and was also theirs in such books as they acknowledged for Scripture; but they most frequently cite the books of the Old Testament, and would doubtless have done so by those of the New, if they had been received as canonical."‡

* Codex Can. Vind. Edit. Elerico. p. 117.

† Apend. Anter. Bibl. Sacr. p. 376.

‡ Dissert. 1, in Iren.

Now, from all these particulars, and what I before observed, it plainly appears, that the books of the Old Testament were the sole canon both of Jews and Christians; and that in the first ages of Christianity no other writings were accounted canonical; neither had they any other Scriptures but the Old Testament; and all the evidence which is produced to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, must be taken from there; for no other evidence can be of any validity or authority. Neither could he claim the messiahship but from the prophecies; and, therefore, Jesus constantly refers to the evidence of the Old Testament. "In fine," says the most ingenious Mr. Collins, "Jesus and his apostles do frequently and emphatically style the books of the Old Testament 'the Scriptures,' and refer men to them as their rule and canon; but no new books are declared by them to have that character, And if Jesus and his apostles have declared no books to be canonical: I would ask who did, or who could, afterwards declare or make any books canonical? If it had been deemed proper, and suited to the state of Christianity, to have given or declared a new canon, or digest of laws: it should seem most proper to have been done by Jesus or his apostles, and not left to any after them to do; but especially not left to be settled long after their times, by weak, fallible, factious, and interested men, who were disputing with one another about the genuineness of all books bearing the names of the apostles, and contending with one another about the authority of every different book."* "Indeed, to speak properly," says the same ingenious person, "the Old Testament is yet the sole true canon of Scripture, meaning thereby a canon, established by those who had a divine

* Grounds and Reasons. p. 13.

authority to establish a canon, and in virtue thereof, did establish a canon, as it was in the beginning of Christianity.* The Old Testament being, without dispute, the only Scripture both of Jews and Christians, are we to judge from that alone of the office and character of the Messiah; and for this purpose it will be proper to extract a few of the many prophecies concerning the Messiah, his kingdom, and the events to happen in his time, the better to compare them with what is related of Jesus in the New Testament, in which they are said to be fulfilled.

1. "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the North to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers."—Jeremiah iii. 18.

2. "Thus saith the LORD GOD, behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations† whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land, and will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all, and they shall no more be two nations; neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all; neither shall they defile themselves any more their with idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will save them out of all their dwelling places wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them, so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And DAVID my servant shall be king over them, and they shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do

* Grounds and Reasons, p. 16, 17.

† There is no such word in Hebrew as gentiles or heathen, as it only means *nations*.

them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt, and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever; and my servant DAVID shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, it shall be an everlasting covenant, and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them, yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people; and the nations shall know that I, the LORD, do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore."—Ezekiel xxxvii. 21-36.

3. "And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed; neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his day Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but the LORD liveth which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries wherein I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land."—Jeremiah xxiii. 3-8.

4. "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign to the people; to it shall the gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim."—Isaiah xi. 10–13.

5. "Therefore, thus saith the LORD GOD, now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name, after that they have borne their shame and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out from their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the nations; but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there, neither will I hide my face any more from them; for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the LORD GOD."—Ezekiel xxxix. 25–29.

6. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream

of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem."—Isaiah xxvii. 12, 13.

7. "Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant DAVID; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant DAVID a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land, and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them, and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in its season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beasts of the land devour them; they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more."—Ezekiel xxxiv. 22-29.

8. "And there shall be no more a pricking briar unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round

about them that despised them; and they shall know that I am the LORD God. Thus saith the LORD God, When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence, when I have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them; and they shall know that I am the LORD their God."—Ezekiel xxviii. 24–26.

9. "As I live, saith the Lord God, Surely with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you. And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there I will plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God."—Ezekiel xx. 33–36.

10. "I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen."—Ezekiel xx. 41, 42.

11. "Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he."—Jeremiah xxxi. 10, 11.

12. "Fear not, for I am with thee; I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, give up; and to the south, keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth, even every one that is called by my name; for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him."—Isaiah xliii. 5, 6, 7.*

It is needless to transcribe more passages declarative of these great events of which the prophetic writings are full. From these and many other prophecies of the like nature, we may collect the office and character of the Messiah. But before we proceed, it is certainly necessary to explain the meaning of the word Messiah. משיח *Messiah* or *Mashiach*, as pronounced in Hebrew, signifies "annointed," or "the anointed one." It is applied to kings, priests and prophets, as they were anointed to their office. Jews, therefore, by way of eminence and emphasis, called, and continue to call, that person whom God should raise up, and make the instrument for the accomplishment of such prophecies, as particularly describe, and foretell the delivery and glory of the nation, by this name. Now, if Christians will prove that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies, they will then convert the Jews, for they require nothing else.†

* Mr. Dias quotes the ordinary Bible version, which strengthens, if any thing, his argument.

† With due deference to the author, we wish to observe that only his mission as Messiah would thereby be proved, but not the character which Christians assume for him; since the one whom we expect is to be a man acting under the power and guidance of the Lord, but not a part of the divinity. Such a being is contrary to scripture and is not the CHRIST whom we expect.—ED. Oc.

LETTER VII.

I THINK it necessary, before we proceed, to clear up the objections generally made against such prophecies, as declare and foretell the deliverance of the Jews, from their present dispersion, and the glorious restoration to God's favour; and the different methods which are taken in the explanation and application of those prophecies, And first—

Some pretend that the promises were made good, and that the prophecies received their accomplishment, at the return from the Babylonish captivity; and that consequently, the hopes of a future deliverance are vain and without foundation. In order to clear up this point, let the prophecies be compared with what, as, Ezra and Nehemiah relate befell the nation at their return from Babylon, and let us see if all those glorious promises did then receive their accomplishments. To those passages which I transcribed in my last, I shall here add one whole chapter of Isaiah, that, according to his description of those glorious times, the comparison may be made.

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For behold the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee, and the gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at *thy* side. Then thou shalt see,

and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Epha; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. Who *are* these *that* fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that *men* may bring unto thee the forces of the gentiles, and *that* their kings *may be* brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea *those* nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee: and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so

that no man went through *thee*, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the gentiles, and shall suck the breast of kings; and thou shalt know that I the LORD *am* thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day: neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also *shall be* all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.”*

This is the glorious state of the Jews, according to the prophet's description. It will be tiresome to make extracts from Ezra and Nehemiah, to prove that nothing like this appeared to the nation at their return from Babylon. I shall, therefore, refer you to the accounts which these writers give of this miserable return, and the many hardships and interruptions the buildings meet with, together with the weakness

* Isaiah lx. Eng. Bible version.

and wickedness of those few who did return. I shall content myself with giving you a few passages from the history now in the greatest vogue.

“It will be convenient (says the historian) to premise some few things concerning the state of the Jews during this new epoch; for, from this time, they are no more to be looked upon as that free, rich, and glorious people which they had been, either under the former theocracy, as Josephus justly terms it, or under their opulent and warlike monarchs, and the direction of their prophets. Their condition, government, manners, their very name is now entirely changed; and though some of them we find to have attained to very considerable posts, or growing exceeding rich in the land of their captivity, yet these are but few in comparison of those who groaned under the heavy hand of their oppressors. Neither were they the former, but the latter, that is, the poorer sort, that came back into Judea; and even of these, the whole number of all that came, either with Zerubbabel, Ezra, or Nehemiah, scarcely amounted to *seventy thousand*, among whom a multitude of strangers were likewise intermixed, either by marriages or otherwise: most of them so indigent, that they were forced to be supported in their journey by the charitable contributions of those that stayed behind. They were indeed to be governed by their own laws; but as they still continued in subjection to other nations, to the Persians, Greeks, and Romans, that privilege, as well as the exercise of their religion, very much depended upon the arbitrary will of their conquerors. Even whilst they were under the Persians, the lives and estates of the whole nation were on the brink of

being sacrificed to the ambition of a favourite.”* Now, from this description, it plainly appears that none of the prophecies did receive their accomplishments at the said return, nor at any time after; so that the promises therein made are still unfulfilled.

I think proper, now we are on this subject, to observe the exact description which Moses makes of the present dispersion of the Jews, which according to the circumstances he foretells cannot be applied to any other. “And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other: and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy feet have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind. And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night, and shall have none assurance of thy life.”†

It is impossible that any historian could describe the state of the Jews in their present dispersion more exactly; for what more could he say concerning their miserable state, than they are scattered from one end of the earth to the other? that they are obliged to worship strange gods, unknown to their ancestors, made of wood and stone? that they neither have ease nor rest? continual fear and trembling, both day and night, with never-ceasing sorrows and doubts? persecuted, imprisoned and delivered to the flames? This has been the miserable state of the Jews in many

* Universal History, Vol. vi. Chap. 10.

† Deut. xxviii. 64-66.

places, and is still their case in Spain and Portugal.* There is not in this prophecy the least resemblance of what the Jews suffered in any other captivity. In the time of the Judges they were often overcome, and made tributary, but never dispersed. At the first destruction of Jerusalem they were made captives, and carried to Babylon; but so far were they there from worshipping other gods, that it entirely cured them from idolatry; so that from that epoch the Jews are never accused of that heinous crime. And their being obliged to worship gods unknown to them and their ancestors, plainly points out a new system of idolatry, invented and introduced long after that time. And as all the circumstances do wonderfully agree to their present dispersion and oppressions, so their return (described in the following passage), "That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee; and will return and gather thee from among all the nations whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee:—If *any* of thine be driven out unto the utmost *parts* of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee; and the LORD thy God will bring thee unto the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers,"† can only be from their present captivity, as the circumstances which were promised them were never accomplished nor made good in any of their former deliverances.

Now if the promises made to the Jews by all the pro-

* It must be kept in mind that these letters were written about 1750, when many martyrdoms were witnessed in these countries for the sake of the faith.—ED. OC.

† Deuteronomy xxx. 3-5,

phets have not been fulfilled at the return from Babylon, nor at any other time either before or since : it follows that their hopes of a Messiah, or a person whom God is to appoint to make good his promise to the nation, in their deliverance and restoration, are just and well grounded ; and it must be vain and presumptuous to pretend that the prophecies have been fulfilled, whilst they find themselves in a situation so very opposite to that which the prophets fortell and describe ; a contradiction so glaring, that I wonder any one should pretend to affirm it.

LETTER VIII.

THE difficulties, which arise from the prophecies concerning the delivery and return of the Jews not being completed, are obviated by pretending that none of these prophecies ought to be taken in their plain, literal sense and obvious meaning ; in other words, they will not allow the prophecies to have any meaning at all, in order to impose on all such prophecies, and likewise on many historical passages of Scripture, what they call a spiritual, or figurative and typical sense and meaning of their own, such as best suits with their purposes ; accommodating, by these means, prophecies and history to events with which neither the one nor the other has the least connexion, contrary to the express sense of the prophets and the passages cited ; and therefore, they cannot expect that any credit should be given them. Of this, the most learned are sensible, and confess that they “ can give no tolerable reason why the prophecies

concerning his (Jesus's) humiliation and sufferings should be understood in a literal, and those of his exaltation and glorious reign, in a spiritual sense."* The case then stands thus: the Jews must be convinced from the prophecies, that Jesus was the glorious person therein promised for their Messiah; not according to the sense and meaning of the words of the prophets, for they are entirely repugnant to such pretensions; but according to the sense and meaning which Christians shall be pleased arbitrarily to impose on all the prophets, (without assigning any tolerable reasons, as is confessed by them,) though that sense be the most contradictory to the prophets' description; for otherwise they can prove nothing. It is a very just and judicious observation, "that the Jew possessed the oracles of God, and was firmly persuaded of the truth of them. The very first thing, therefore, that he had to do, upon the appearance of the Messiah, was to examine his title, by the character given of him in the prophets; he could not, consistently with the belief in God and faith in the ancient prophecies, attend to other arguments, till fully satisfied and convinced in this. All the prophecies of the Old Testament, relating to the office and character of the Messiah, were immovable bars to all pretensions, till fulfilled and accomplished in the person."† This is so fair a state of the case, that none of the parties can reasonably have any objection against it; and there only wants proofs that Jesus did fulfil and accomplish the character given of the Messiah in the prophets. Now if this be done according to the plain sense and mean-

* Universal History, vol. iii. p. 39.

† Sherlock on Prophecy, 6th Discourse, p. 157.

ing of the prophecies, the character which they give us is so contradictory and repugnant to that of Jesus, that *his* pretensions can have no manner of foundation on that description; for the plain sense of the prophecies is, and ever will be, an immovable bar to his claim.

But if we are to judge of his title from the sense which Christians impose on the prophets, then the character given by the prophecies can be of no manner of signification, and, therefore, it would be in vain to examine his title by the character given of him in the prophets; since, let the character be ever so ample and plain, yet such a meaning would be imposed on the words of the prophets as might make them answer very different purposes. And this is actually the case; for if we are to have no regard to the plain sense and meaning of the prophets, and take a liberty to depart from their literal and obvious meanings: how can we distinguish the true Messiah from the vain pretender, who may, by types and allegories, impose such a sense of his own on the prophecies as may easily be made to answer his pretensions, and by such means apply them to himself and his purposes, construing them according to his fancy, and, under a pretence of a refined spiritual sense, be able to prove thereby all the passages of his life, both from prophecy and Scripture history? For, as no regard is to be had to the prophets' literal meaning, no bounds can be put to any person's imaginations; for all will be spiritualized. But would not the Jews be in the most deplorable condition, if they admitted allegory for proof? would they not be liable to the grossest abuse and deception? and could they in any other way oppose such pretenders, but from the plain and literal sense of the prophecies? and must they not be-

lieve that the prophets had but that one plain sense and meaning, and argue accordingly from it? For to suppose that "an author has but one meaning at a time to a proposition, (which is to be found out by a critical examination of his words,) and to cite that proposition from him, and argue from it in that one meaning, is to proceed by the common rules of grammar and logic, which, being human rules, are not very difficult to be set forth and explained; but to suppose passages cited, explained, and argued from in any other method, seems very extraordinary."* And such a method can only serve to open a door to fraud and imposition; for when once we depart from the plain and obvious meaning of an author, and put a different sense on his words, we then commit such an act of violence as nothing can justify. But it is still worse, when we do the like to inspired writings; for we, in such case, deprive the prophet of his meaning, which is infallible, and in its place substitute our own weak fallible sense, and that for no other reason but because it best serves our purposes; and it must give one a very bad opinion of the cause which depends on such a support. For "allegory is a figure in discourse which we are then said to use, when we make the terms which are peculiar to one thing to signify another."† This being the case, can allegory or types prove any thing, much less a Messiah, whose character and office are plainly revealed in the Scriptures? And pray, what is there which may not be proved, when terms and words, peculiar to one thing, are made to signify another? What confusion must ensue

* Grounds and Reasons, p. 51.

† Calmet's Dictionary, on the word Allegory.

on such a scheme? How invalid must the proof of the Messiah be, if founded on types and allegory! For “allegorical explanations may edify indeed,” (says a learned person,) “but they are good for nothing else; they cannot be regularly produced as proofs of any thing.” St. Paul founded Christianity on allegory, and though he says that he uses great “plainness of speech,”* yet is all Scripture by him turned into type. This he does even to the historical passages, and that when the literal sense is most clear. To this end he declares himself and others to be “ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit, for” (says he) “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”† It is by this invention that he pretends to prove every thing; for he applies his allegories and types without the least resemblance, or without the least likeness of the types to the antitype. This is plain and evident from every chapter of the writings which go under his name. Thus, for example, he makes the patriarch’s two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, to typify two covenants.‡

Again—Abraham’s concubine is with him a type of Mount Sinai, in Arabia.§ This same Mount Sinai in Arabia stands with him for a type of Jerusalem in bondage with her children. He carries this type still farther; for this same Jerusalem typifies that above, which he calls the mother of all.|| After the same manner he makes Malchizedek a type of Jesus, whom he declares to have been made like the Son of God.¶ By the same art he turns the veil which Moses put over his face, where it shone, into a type

* 2 Corinthians iii. 12, 16.

† Ibid. 6.

‡ Galatians iv. 22.

§ Ibid. 25.

|| Ibid. 26.

¶ Heb. vii. 3.

of the Jews not understanding the Scriptures, that is, his spiritual sense of them.* In the same way he pretends that God himself preached the gospel to Abraham.† By the same help he declares the baptism of the Israelites unto Moses. This he finds typified by their passing the Red Sea, and their being under the cloud of smoke.‡ The water which the Israelites drank from the rock Moses struck, he calls spiritual drink; and he not only makes that rock to follow the camp, but will have the rock itself to be the Messiah.§ By the same never-failing art he proves that the tribe of Levi paid tithe some hundred years before its existence.|| In short, the passover, the tabernacle, and every thing in it, the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, their entering into the land of Canaan, and the whole Jewish economy and history is, by St. Paul, turned into types; and he makes every thing subservient to his point. But if this method proves any thing, it proves that the same passages and figures might prove a thousand things besides, for which they may be made to stand, and such proofs would be, to the full, as conclusive as St. Paul's.

This must be the natural consequence of believing that the letter killeth, or rather, of resolving to kill the letter; because, otherwise the letter would kill their purposes: and when once we embrace the opinion of making the terms which are peculiar to one thing stand for another, the same thing may be made to typify things the most opposite and contrary to each other. Thus it is observed, that "the serpent was remarkable for an insidious cunning, and there-

* 2 Cor. iii. 13-15.

‡ Ibid. 3.

† Galat. iii. 8.

|| Heb. vii. 9, 10.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 1, 2.

fore stand as a proper emblem of a deceiver."* Another asserts that "it cannot be doubted but under the name of the serpent we ought to understand the devil."† Yet, notwithstanding the serpent stands for, and means the devil, one of the evangelists declares, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up :"[‡] by which means the servent serves to typify both Jesus and the devil. Such strange things are allegories ! A fruitful imagination might still carry the allegory farther, and show how the serpent caused the people to err by the worship which was paid it.

Now let me seriously ask, can such whims be admitted for proofs? or can any one pretend the conversion of the Jews on such evidence? May we not as well believe Luther to have been the antitype of Aaron, (as one of his followers pretended,) because he first set up the candlestick of the reformation? or shall we believe Calvin to have been the antitype of the same High Priest (as one of his followers pretended), "because it was beyond all doubt," (says he,) "that if he had not taken the snuffers into his hand, the candlestick must have given so dim a light that few people would have been the better for it."§ Pray, is there not just the same foundation for the idle dreams of Luther's and Calvin's followers, in making each their master to be Aaron's antitype, as there is for those others made by St. Paul? If we believe the one, why not the other? Can such reveries pass; because delivered under the name of this or that man?

* Sherlock on Prophecy, p. 57.

† Calmet's Dict., on the word Serpent.

‡ John iii. 14.

§ Le Clerc. Bibl. Tom. x. p. 313. See Likewise Universal History, Vol. iii. p. 404.

The authority of all men must be upon a level, if they deliver things alike inconsistent, or equally contrary to facts. How easily may Scripture be applied to every passage of a man's life, if such liberty be allowed! But certainly any person would be deservedly laughed at who should pretend to prove the actions of his life from thence by turning it into types.

It is therefore evident that the prophecies ought to be taken in their plainest and most obvious sense and literal meaning: "for it is but justice to the omnipotent Being to believe that HE speaks candidly and intelligibly to his creatures,"* and it is highly derogating from the goodness of God to think otherwise; and therefore the contrary method, when made use of, must be incoherent and inconsistent, enthusiastical and erroneous, invented for unwarrantable purposes, and made use of to deceive and blind our eyes for lack of better proof, excluding the Scripture from any meaning at all; and, as it may be made use of to prove any thing, and to square to every man's opinion, it can of course have no force in argument, and therefore cannot be produced in proof of any thing. Of this opinion was Bishop Smallbrook, who says: "So very fanciful a thing is allegorical interpretation, that not only different fathers build different allegories on the same facts, but the very same father at different times, and on different subjects, makes different applications of the very same literal story;† and in his preface he says: "Allegories prove any thing out of any thing."‡

* Independent Whig, No. 74.

† Vindication of the Miracles, chap. v. p. 254.

‡ Ibid. p. 8.

I cannot better conclude this letter, than with a passage of the same bishop,* viz :—All that I would desire of the reader here, is to observe the great uncertainty of mystical interpretation in itself, as it is a mere creature of fancy.”

LETTER IX.

THE literal meaning of prophecy is what Christian writers would, if they could handsomely do it, get rid of ; not because the prophecies are in themselves hard to be understood, or difficult to be explained, but because their obvious meanings and plain drift run counter to the system which they labour to establish ; for otherwise, they are very fond of the plain sense and literal meaning, provided there is any appearance in their favour, or resemblance by which they can make it square with their doctrines ; for they then exult as if that alone were sufficient to prove their point, overlooking whatever else is necessarily connected with, and belonging to the same subject ; they generally extract here and there little scraps and parts of Scripture, and join them together, but which, considered and examined in their proper places, and connected with their proper subjects, mean quite a different thing.

But, notwithstanding their commentaries, their innumerable volumes to reconcile their contradictions, their endeavours to drown or hide the insufficiency of their proofs, by glosses and rhetorical discourses, their subtleties

* Vindication of the Miracles, chap. viii. p. 359.

and evasions, their declamations and subterfuges, their arts and continual inventions, their types and their allegories, they still find themselves greatly embarrassed and perplexed, how, consistently, to prove the prophecies fulfilled. Neither can they in any literal degree (not even to their own satisfaction) fit the accomplishment to the prophecy, or the type to the antitype. We are, indeed, told that "one of the characters which Jesus claims and assumes in the gospel is this—that he was the person spoken of by Moses and the prophets; whether he is this person or not must be tried by the words of prophecy."* Undoubtedly it must; but how the characters given of the Messiah by the prophets answers the accomplishment in Jesus, by which we are to judge of his claim, and whether he is that person or not, is what ought to have been made clear and evident from the prophecies; for it is here that the difficulties lie. But the learned prelate, instead of proving this point, and clearing up the difficulties which attend it, most unaccountably shifts the argument; for, though he refers you to the prophets for consideration, as the criterion by which you must form a judgment, yet he tells you that, "'tis evident the word of prophecy was not intended to give a clear and distinct light in this case;"† "that prophecy was never intended to be a very strict evidence;"‡ "'tis absurd to expect clear and evident conviction from every single prophecy as applied to Christ."§—How so? must people be sent to the prophecies to judge whether Jesus is the person spoken of, and yet be told "that prophecy was never intended to

* Intent and Use of Prophecy, page 42,

† Ibid. 30.

† Ibid. p. 28.

‡ Ibid. 33.

be a very distinct evidence ; and that it is absurd to expect conviction from that which we are sent to, and by which we must try his claim?" Why are we sent to the prophets for conviction, if it is not to be had there? or if it is absurd to expect it? But the absurdity does most certainly centre in this learned prelate; for I would willingly know on what other evidence it can be proved to the Jews, that Jesus is the Messiah, but from the prophecies concerning him in the Old Testament? And if these be clearly and evidently fulfilled, as they pretend they are, then let them abide by the test; for it is ridiculous, first to send them to the prophets to judge his claim, and then to take away the force of their evidence, by declaring that they cannot expect conviction from them; and, consequently, that they can have none!

The Bishop, as a means to establish the insufficiency of the evidence from the prophecies, takes great pains to represent them as dark and obscure. You will no doubt think his conduct strange; and indeed he thinks so himself, and makes the following apology for his behaviour: "You may think it perhaps strange," says he, "that I should be here pleading as it were, for the obscurity of ancient prophecy, whereas you may very well conceive it would be more to the purpose of a Christian divine to maintain their clearness. Now, as Moses in another case said, "I would to God all the Lord's people were prophets;" so say I, in this case; I would to God all the prophecies of the Lord were manifest unto all his people; but it matters not what we wish or think."* But there are those who maintain

* Intent and Use of Prophecy, p. 36.

their clearness, whether it be for the purposes of Christian divines or not.

Whoever is any way acquainted with the writings of such learned divines as have written in support and defence of Christianity, must be fully convinced of the insurmountable difficulties under which they labour, in proving the messiahship of Jesus from the prophecies, as applied to, and said to be fulfilled by him. For some, proceeding on the allegorical scheme, ground the pretensions of Jesus on the turn which they are pleased to give the prophecies, and apply them as fulfilled in the sense which they impose on them. Others unsatisfied with arguments drawn from such proofs, oppose this scheme as weak and absurd, (though thereby they oppose the evangelists and apostles) and endeavour to establish his messiahship, by pretending to a literal application of the prophecies. The consequence is they prove nothing but the glorious deliverance expected by the Jews. Some, in these difficulties, fly for refuge to his miracles, and pretend to prove his messiahship from his works. Some fly to the goodness and soundness of his doctrines, and from thence prove his messiahship. Some invent a heavenly kingdom, and from that oppose the prophecies. Others take on themselves, and usurp, the names of Israel and Judah, and then prove the prophecies accomplished in them. But after all, they seem so dissatisfied with these inventions of theirs, that at last they are obliged to confess their insufficiency, and declare, and as firmly believe, the restoration of the Jews, as the Jews do themselves; and this they prove by the same arguments, and from those very prophecies on which the Jews ground

their hopes and expectations. All which I shall make very clear to you.

Such are the methods which are made use of, and such the contradictions and inconsistencies to be met with in their writings, and often times in the same author. But you must not impute this to their want either of abilities or learning, for many of them are famous for both; but you must impute it to the cause, which in itself is inconsistent, and not to be either supported or defended on any rational principle whatever; and they are reduced to such perplexities in defending the prophecies mentioned in the Old Testament, and said to be fulfilled by Jesus in the New, that not being able to show their connexions and pertinency, it is no wonder that they represent them as dark and obscure, and give them up as difficult to be applied, and endeavour to extricate themselves by placing the proofs on something more to their purpose, though in their hearts they wish they had more clear prophecies. But is it reasonable to expect the conviction of the Jews but from the clearest evidence? Give me leave to ask, with the learned prelate, "Is not this now a choice account of the Gospel? Are we still surrounded on all sides with darkness?"* And pray who can help it, if the plain sense and meaning of the prophecies run counter to the intents and designs of that to which they are applied? And the fault does not lie in the prophecies, for *they* are most clear, though very dark indeed as they are applied. But the reason is plain and obvious; because they never were intended to prove that which they are applied to, and for that reason will eternally be dark

* Intent and Use of Prophecy, p. 7.

and obscure, in like manner as any passage out of any other author would be dark and obscure if it should be applied contrary to the author's meaning and plain sense; but the darkness, in such case, would not be in the author, but in the application. Nothing can be plainer, according to the Gospel scheme, than, that the words of prophecy were the foundation on which Jesus claimed the messiahship; and as a demonstration that he was the person foretold, he refers to them for conviction, and tells those he spoke to, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."* "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me."† "And he said unto them, these are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me."‡ "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the thing concerning himself."§ Now let me ask, did Jesus apply the prophecies to himself in their clear sense, and plain meaning,—or did he impose another sense and meaning on them? were they plain and clear prophecies by which he undertook to prove himself the Messiah, such as carried their own convictions with them,—or were they dark and obscure, such as it is absurd to expect conviction from? If he did it according to the clear sense and plain meaning of the prophecies, then, on the same foundation, he may still be proved from the prophecies; and it will be absurd, if this be the case, to endeavour either to darken or throw obscurity on

* John, v. 39.

† Ibid. 46.

‡ Luke, xxiv. 44.

Ibid. 27.

them ; but if he proved himself the Messiah from dark and obscure prophecies, or, which is the same thing, if he applied the prophecies in a dark and obscure sense, then must such proof be insufficient to produce conviction ; for a “ figurative and dark description of a future event,” says a learned prelate, “ will be figurative and dark when the event happens, and consequently will have all the obscurity of a dark and figurative description, as well after, as before the event, so that it can be no proof at all.”* And let Christians say what they please, it is certain that the prophets speak clearly and intelligibly concerning the Messiah and his office ; and it is from them that we are to judge, who is the true Messiah ; consequently, if Jesus is the Messiah, and they can prove him to be the true one, how absurd must it be to represent the prophecies as dark and obscure ! or to pretend that no conviction is to be expected from them, when “ all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold these days.”† From the prophecies it was that the Bereans found out that Jesus was the Messiah ; “ for they searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.”‡

Now if this foundation on which the Christian religion is built, the foundation on which Jesus and his apostles established it, can afford no distinct evidence, “ nor ever was intended to give a clear and distinct light on the case :” what must the consequence be of Jesus and his followers appealing to its evidence, and building on a foundation so precarious ? for no superstructure can possibly be stronger than the foundation. For if Jesus be clearly revealed in the

* Intent and use of Prophecy, Dis. 2, p. 33. † Acts iii. 24.

‡ Ibid. xvii. 11.

prophecies, then must the application of them to him be evident; if this be the case, then cannot the prophecies be dark and obscure. But if, on the contrary, they be not clearly and evidently applicable to him as the Messiah, then is all their trouble and pretension vain and ineffectual; for clear proofs never can be had from dark and obscure passages; neither can the conclusion be stronger than the premises.

The prophecies concerning the Messiah, his kingdom, and great glory, as well as that of the Jews, are foretold with such particularity and plainness by all the prophets, as cannot be surpassed by any one description that ever was made. To suppose that the Almighty God should, in an affair of the utmost importance, (an affair that concerned both learned and ignorant,) deliver himself in such terms or words as must introduce into our minds ideas the most opposite and contrary to what his goodness intended to reveal and describe, is to suppose Him capable of deceiving those whom He condescended to instruct and enlighten; and, "it is irrational and impious to suppose that the Almighty God, the good, and merciful God, would give to his creatures instructions, commands, and advice, which were puzzling, obscure, and uncertain, when their eternal salvation was depending upon their conceiving or applying them aright"* Can any thing more unjust be imputed to God than to pretend He reveals one thing and means another? yet this is the deplorable case. How many are the endeavours to make out this very thing! Learning, art, cunning, industry, power, and every human invention is made use of for this

* Independent Whig, No. 74.

purpose; and to make way with their own senseless jargon, they reject, set at naught the words, which, as coming from God, are infallible; and then they set up themselves, and their explanations for such, as if they were neither peccable, fallible nor interested, or were not liable to error, deception, and imposition.

LETTER X.

HAVING mentioned the insurmountable difficulties which attend the application of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, according to their obvious plain sense and meaning, to any person either pretending or claiming that character, which is the only rational proof by which his character is to be maintained and supported: I think some notice ought to be taken of the shifts and evasions to which they have recourse, in which they take shelter, and by which they endeavour and pretend to support a character, which, in reality, is the most contradictory to that which the prophets describe; and to show the fallacy and invalidity of such applications. Their principal engine, is the allegorical or typical scheme, by the help of which they solve all difficulties; for, as it is but making one thing to mean another, they can, by its help, answer all objections; for, Proteus like, they apply it in all shapes and to all things. It is from this scheme that their various arts and inventions have their

rise. As I have already considered this scheme, I shall now only observe,—

1. They declare, “That the prophecies concerning the coming, the character, the death, and passion of the Messiah, are to be found in a multitude of places in the Old Testament, but after a mysterious and figurative manner.”*

2. They declare, “That it does not prove that things had originally any such sense, meaning, and construction, merely because they are afterward referred to, in the way of allegory, simile, or allusion.”†

3. They declare, “That such proofs cannot alone establish any doctrinal truth;‡ and also that they cannot be regularly produced as proofs of any thing.”§

4. They maintain, notwithstanding, “That this is evidently the scheme which the apostle Paul goes upon.”||

The foregoing assertions plainly demonstrate the insufficiency of the allegorical and typical scheme, or that things referred to for proof in the way of figure, simile, and allusion, (which is confessedly St. Paul's scheme) can prove nothing; and, consequently, that all inferences or conclusions from such premises, must be fallacious and invalid.

This appears very evident; for if a prophecy be a future event foretold,¶ nothing but a proper fulfilling of that event can be deemed a completion of the prophecy, and no prophecy, can possibly receive its completion unless it be fulfilled according to the event foretold: therefore it is absurd to pretend that types, allegories, similes, allusions, and figures, are the fulfilling thereof; for nothing but the *entire*

* Calmet on the word Mystery. † Divine Authority, v. ii. p. 181. ‡ Ib.

§ Calmet on the word Allegory. || Divine Authority, v. ii. p. 181.

¶ Calmet on the word Prophecy.

completion of the prophecy, by the event, can be deemed valid ; all other methods being thereby excluded. So much for the allegorical or typical scheme.

Another method and invention whereby they endeavour to solve difficulties arising from the most material prophecies concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, is to remove it to heaven. It was to this new invented heavenly kingdom that “ Jesus invited the high priest, and promised that he should see him sitting at the right hand of power.”* They tell us it is in this kingdom he sits† and reigns with great amplitude of power and dominion, over a most glorious race of spiritual beings and departed souls of true believers, who alone are admitted to the enjoyment of that happiness which, the prophets foretold, the Messiah should introduce here on earth. They have, indeed, carefully guarded against any possibility of searching, or having satisfaction concerning this kingdom, by placing it out of the reach of inquiring mortals ; therefore you must take it all on their bare words.

Another invention to evade the prophecies is to pretend that the kingdom of the Messiah, though they cannot deny it to be of this world, was, nevertheless, not to consist of mere worldly power and dominion, but was to be likewise of a spiritual nature. As in this claim they confound a temporal with a spiritual earthly empire, and as neither the one nor the other is anywise capable of being applied to Jesus—I choose, for this reason, to set it forth in the words of a famous divine :

“ It appears” (says he) “ that the kingdom of the Messiah, and that glorious state of things so much spoken of in

* Matthew xxvi. 64.

† See the Creed.

the prophets, is not to be understood *merely* of a worldly dominion or empire, under the government of a *mere* temporal prince, that was to be a proper king of the Jews, and of *them only*; but of a kingdom of righteousness and peace, of truth and holiness. The proper design was to spread the knowledge and the practice of true religion among men His dominion was to be over all nations.—The blessing of his reign was not to be confined to the Jews only, but was to extend to all nations.”*

This is not only a most glorious description of the character of the Messiah, but likewise a most desirable one. I think it wants only one thing to make it a complete character, and I will add it; it is this: That the Messiah was to gather the dispersed Jews from all countries and restore them. This appears from the twelve prophecies which I have cited, † and from many others. If this, his distinguishing character, be implied in the author's description, by his representing him, “not as a mere king of the Jews, and of them only,” I know not; but let that be as it will, it is plain that, according to this author, the prophets speak much of a glorious state of things under the Messiah; that worldly dominion or empire was a principal part of his character; that he was to be a proper king of the Jews; that the Jews were to enjoy the blessing of his reign. These qualities are extended farther; that is, under *this* glorious state of things the Messiah was to introduce righteousness and peace, truth and holiness, or the knowledge and practice of true religion. He was not only to be a proper king of the Jews, but to have universal empire; for his dominion was to be over all nations,

* Divine Authority, Vol. i. pp. 358, 359.

† See Letter VI.

and the blessings of his reign were not to be confined to the Jews, and them only, but these blessings were to extend to all nations likewise.

Now this being in part the glorious state of things so much spoken of and described by the prophets, and the distinguishing character of the Messiah: it would be an easy matter to work the conversion of the Jews, which might be done only by making application of all this to Jesus. But this they are not able to do; and it is as impossible to prove his spiritual empire as his temporal; for where will they find either the one or the other? Surely persecution and the different sects damning each other, cannot be part of those blessings which were to extend to all nations spiritually. Thus, with the same breath, they endeavour to establish a spiritual kingdom, or empire, which they affect to call a state of peace, and holiness, or the practice of piety and virtue,—but which they cannot prove to have been generally practised at any time. They very effectually establish the power, greatness, and earthly dominion of the Messiah, in like manner as the Jews do; and it is worthy of observation how it weighs them down; for they never endeavour to soar above it, but directly sink under it.

For, notwithstanding Jesus disowns and disclaims any earthly power or authority, by declaring, “That his kingdom was not of this world; for if it were, his servants would fight that he might not be delivered up:”* yet his followers cannot avoid forcing it upon him, contrary to his expressed declaration and renunciation; for they will have him to be, not a mere king of the Jews, but a universal monarch.

* John xviii. 36.

Another invention is, to pretend that the offices and character of the Messiah clash, or are contradictory to one another. The following passage will set this invention in its true light: "The evidence appealed to by our Saviour" (says Mr. West) "was the testimony of the Scriptures, in which are contained not only the promises of a Messiah and Saviour of the world, but the mark and description by which he was to be known. Of these, there are so many, and those so various so seemingly incompatible in one and the same person, and exhibited, under such a multitude of types and figures, that it was absurd for a mere mortal to pretend to answer the character of the Messiah in all points."*

This is the light in which they represent that great and noble character, which all the prophets so unanimously describe. But the absurdity of representing it such as no mere mortal could answer in all points, is owing to themselves. It is nothing but a phantom of their own raising, by applying to him passages which do not belong to him, or ever were intended as any part of his character. This they are obliged to do, that it may answer their purposes, and because the plain characters by which he is described by the prophets, are clearly a contradiction of their schemes. They, therefore, make his character a contradiction, that they may have the opportunity of explaining the prophecies, and applying other passages in such a manner as is most suitable to their cause. Thus it was the custom of designing heathen priests to deliver the oracles of their false gods, couched artfully in dubious or ambiguous terms, "so as to be easily applied to the event, let it fall out which way it would."† For, as they were ignorant of futurity, an ambiguous, or doubtful,

* Dis. on the Christian Revelation, pp. 101, 102.

† Ib.

reserved meaning, delivered in seemingly incompatible or clashing terms, capable of different senses, meanings, and constructions, would certainly bring their votaries to receive the explanations of such oracles from them. This was agreeable to their cause, a cause of darkness, deceit, fraud, lies, error, and imposition. But, to suppose ambiguity, double or hidden constructions, clashing or incompatible meanings in the oracles delivered for our information and direction, by THE ALL-WISE, GOOD, AND MERCIFUL GOD, THE FATHER OF LIGHT, is either to suppose Him as ignorant of futurity, as the priest who made use of that method, or to suppose Him deceiving those whom He, in his great goodness, thought proper to enlighten and instruct; since for this end only did He reveal those things. Therefore, whatever passages clash, or are incompatible, can be no part of that character so often and repeatedly uniformly described. Such passages are, *therefore*, inconsistently ushered in, and made a part of it, by artful and designing men, to answer their own interested views, prejudices, and purposes.

Therefore, in justice to Him who only could foretell and reveal future events with a fixed certainty, we must believe that what He has revealed is candid, and easily to be understood; and that the characters which He describes are uniform, and have neither contradiction, double sense, hidden meaning, or ambiguities; and that those who, represent them in a contrary light, act inconsistently and absurdly.

Another invention which they make use of is, to take and usurp the names by which the Jews are always meant. Of this they stand in very great need; for, how otherwise could they inherit the promises? It is no wonder then that they boldly use the name of Judah and Israel. The fol-

lowing passage shall describe this pretension: "Whereas the Messiah's kingdom seems sometimes to be described with a particular regard to the Jews, and it is foretold that he should reign over them, as their prince and shepherd, and that in his days Israel and Judah shall dwell safely, and in a happy state: there are two things which will entirely take off the advantage; the one is, that the terms Israel and Judah, and the House of Israel, are not to be understood, in the prophets, precisely of the seed of Jacob, literally so called, or of the Jewish people and nation; but are sometimes designed for the church in general."*

This is the method by which the Jews are entirely to be deprived of the advantages promised them. Here, then, by a dash of the pen, you have the Jews stripped of their name, and the advantages of the promises to them made; and both the one and the other transferred to the church in general. They, whenever they stand in need of it for their purpose, (as sometimes they do,) why then, they make use of it; but, their turn being served, they very willingly part with it, and generally restore it to the right owner; for, whenever there is a calamity foretold, that should happen to Judah or Israel, then the Jews are thereby meant; and, upon such an occasion, they are the literal seed of Jacob, and they will most certainly find it fulfilled and accomplished. But whenever they find any promises of good things, or happy days, then the Jews, or literal seed of Jacob, have nothing to do with it; for the advantage of their name must be taken from them, and such things only

* Divine Authority, Vol. i. p. 162.

† The remaining portion of this letter is wanting in our MS. We copy therefore from the "Jew" in which paper it first appeared.

belong to the Christian church, that is, to the mysterious seed of Jacob.

Thus absurdly do they reason, and make the prophecies a two-edged tool, to cut which way they please. Should not a reason be given why the literal sense should be applied one time, and a different one at another? Have not the Jews a right to urge that the words of the prophets were always understood and taken in the literal sense, whenever they described or foretold either the exaltation or downfall of any people or kingdom? And are not such prophecies always applied according to their plain sense, and literal meaning? Nay, is it not an argument made use of to prove the inspiration of the prophets, that they did so clearly foretell such events? Would not the Jews, in their Egyptian bondage, have had great reason to refuse the mission of any person that should have pretended to persuade them that the promises which God made to Abraham, of their delivery from thence, and of possessing the land of Canaan, were not to be taken in their literal meaning, but that these promises meant, and should be applied and explained in a spiritual sense? Are not the promises made to the House of Israel and of Judah of their delivery from their oppression and dispersion, and their return from all parts, as express as those made concerning their delivery from Egypt? If so, the Jews act consistently in rejecting the sense of a spiritual delivery from their present dispersion: in like manner as their ancestors would have acted judiciously to refuse the mission of that person who should have pretended their delivery from Egypt was only to be spiritual, and not from their oppression, which was the promise made; and as God made good his promise, in delivering them literally

from Egypt, why should they not expect, and hope for, a literal accomplishment of his promise in this other?

How absurd would it appear, even to Christians, were any nation or people to pretend that the promise to Abraham, of the delivery of his seed from Egypt, was not intended for his descendants, but meant themselves, who were intend by that promise to have a spiritual deliverance! The fallacy of such a supposition they would immediately discover and detect; and, dare I affirm, would agree very much in favour of the delivery of the Jews, and very clearly show how chimerical that people or nation's pretensions were, and demonstrate the absurdity of such a claim, and the vanity of usurping a name which was none of theirs. Now if it be absurd in the one case, why not in the other? Besides, if the Jews are the natural seed of Jacob for their calamities, why not for the promise of good things? And if they are literally fulfilled in one case, why should they not be literally accomplished in the other?

But the vanity of this pretension is plainly described by the prophet, in these words: "One shall say, I am the LORD's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand by the name of Israel."* From the prophet they have also the answer: "Who, as I, shall call and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming and shall come, let them show unto them."† "Is my hand shortened at all that I cannot redeem, or have I no power to deliver?"‡

To conclude this long letter: it is by such arts and

* Isaiah xliv. 5.

† Ib. 7.

‡ Ib. 1. 2.

inventions, without any authority, that they pretend to reconcile the greatest difficulties and contradictions. Allow them but the means, and they will attain their ends. Take but their words, and every thing is made clear by the application and explanation of terms and passages.

There are, besides, some other methods and inventions, which I shall take notice of upon proper occasion.

LETTER XI.

THE better to show the insufficiency of the arts and inventions, mentioned in my last, it is necessary to instance some prophecies, which being explained according to those rules, you will then be the better able to judge the vanity of all such arts, and how absurd it is to pretend by such evasions to prove either the fulfilling of the prophecies, or to support any claim. It is pretended, "that the prophets intimated clear enough, that a new dispensation was to be introduced, and a new covenant different from that which God made with their fathers."* To prove this they refer to a passage of Jeremiah, which I will transcribe at length, give you its literal meaning, and then consider it according to the application made by their arts. The passage is as follows:—

"Behold, the days come saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with

* Divine Authority, Vol. i. p. 101.

their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt ; which my covenant (Berith) they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the LORD. But this *shall* be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law (*Torah**) in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD ; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD ; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar ; the LORD of Hosts is his name : If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, *then* the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD, If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel, for all that they have done, saith the LORD. Behold the days come, saith the LORD, that the city shall be built to the LORD from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner. And the measuring line shall yet go forth over against it, upon the hill Gareb, and shall compass about to Goath. And the whole valley of the dead bodies, and of the ashes and all the fields unto the brook Kidron, unto the corner of the horse-gate towards the east, *shall be* holy unto the LORD ; it

* *Torah* is the law of *Moses* ; *Berith* is the covenant concerning its observance.

shall not be plucked up nor thrown down any more for ever.”*

Now from this prophecy it plainly appears, that God was to make a new covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah, or Jewish nation, which covenant should not be broken like that made with their fathers. The condition on the people's part is, that they are to observe the law, (signified by God's writing it on their hearts, and fixing it in their inward parts,) and be God's peculiar people: and God, on his part, was to forgive and forget their iniquity and sin, was to restore, preserve them, and be their God, and cause their city to be built, never more to be destroyed. This, in few words, are the contents of the promised covenant, according to the clear sense and obvious meaning of the prophet, conformable and agreeable to the repeated promise made to the nation, by all the prophets. The plain meaning of this prophecy, and the peculiar terms in which it is delivered, ought, one would think, to deter people from practising their arts, and imposing meanings thereon, so different from, and so entirely contradictory to that of the prophet. He has entered into a particular description of the people who were to be parties or partakers of the new covenant. And he has also particularized and declared, not only its contents, but likewise in what it was to differ from the former one. Thus it plainly appears, that God would enter into a new covenant with the Jews; but that a new law, or any new dispensation, was to be introduced, has no manner of foundation. That the new covenant was to be different from that which their fathers entered

* Jeremiah, Chap. xxxi., verse 31 to the end. *Bible Translation.*

into, is likewise plain and evident. But what has that to do with a new dispensation which is pretended was to be introduced? does not the prophet declare in what the difference was to consist? The former covenant had been conditional; by it the nation's happiness and welfare were made to depend entirely on the observance of that which they stipulated; but they continually failed, and broke the conditions, and, in consequence, often received exemplary punishments. But the new covenant was to be formed upon an entirely new plan; by it the nation's happiness was to be permanent, lasting, unconditional; for they were to have such knowledge of God, from the least to the greatest, as was to insure duty and fidelity ever after; and this in such a manner, that though all nations failed, yet the Jews should never be cast off, or cease to be a nation; for the same Almighty Power that created the universe, and gave laws to nature, would preserve and protect them. This, then, are the contents and condition of the new covenant; and the difference from the old to the new is this. By the old, the nation's happiness was only conditional; whereas, by the new, it is to be absolute and unconditional. The old they often broke, but the new they never should break; for it was to be as lasting as nature itself.

The reasoning of St. Paul on this passage is most remarkable, and ought not to be passed in silence. He will have Jesus to be the mediator of it,* and reasons, "that if the first covenant had been faultless, there had been no place for a second."† To these two assertions, I shall only say, 1st, that the prophet neither points out Jesus, nor intimates

* Heb. viii. 6.

† Ibid. 7.

any thing concerning a mediator; and 2dly, that, had any other than St, Paul declared that what God did was faulty, so many arguments would be urged against him by Christian divines, and such a defence be made of God's goodness and conduct, that the impossibility of his committing any fault would be made so evident as should silence all such opinions. And there appears so little connexion between the new covenant promised by the prophet, and the transaction related to have happened in the time of Jesus, that I cannot see the least resemblance of the prophecy to the completion. The comparing of a few instances may help to set this in a clear light.

It is pretended that Jesus was the mediator of the new covenant; but how was this performed? did he enter into any agreement or covenant with the house of Israel? No, the Jews know of none, and history is entirely silent, as to this circumstance, and not the least footstep of any such contract is to be traced. Besides no contract can be made without the consent of the parties; and if they did not give either *their express* or *tacit* consent, the covenant, or contract, can never be either valid or binding. But was it at that time that God entered into a special relation with the houses of Israel and Judah, of being their God, and taking them for his chosen people?

Was it then that they were full of the knowledge of God, even from the least to the greatest?

Was it at that time that God forgave their sins and iniquity?

Were they at that time restored, never more to be cast off, or cease to be a nation?

Was then the time in which their city should be rebuilt, never after to be plucked up or thrown down?

These particulars, it is well known, never came to pass, neither then nor since. How, then, could the promised covenant take place? Should not every particular circumstance of the prophet's description be fulfilled and accomplished, before they lay their claims? and are not things represented in the very opposite, or contrary extreme?

For, instead of having God's law fixed in their hearts, they are represented as the wickedest generation that ever existed.

Instead of having a perfect knowledge of God, and being his people, they are represented as the most abominable and reprobate nation under heaven.

Instead of having their city and temple rebuilt, never more to be destroyed, behold both miserably laid waste!

Instead of being a nation never to be cast off, behold them struggling under every species of hardship, oppression and dependence.

Instead of having their sins forgiven, they are represented as committing, at that very time, the most heinous and atrocious crimes, particularly that of refusing the Messiah, and putting him to an ignominious death.

Instead of continuing a glorious nation, behold them miserable, conquered, and dispersed throughout the four corners of the earth, persecuted in turn by every nation.

How, then, is this prophecy fulfilled? Has the application the least shadow of agreement with the promise therein contained?

But here they take shelter in their evasions, and fly for

refuge to their arts and inventions, the strength of which let us examine.

They say that by the names of Israel and Judah, not the Jews, but the gentiles, are thereby intended and meant. It is the Christian church, under those denominations, that was to enjoy the peculiar privileges and advantages promised by the new covenant. Were they able to make out their claim, it would be but reasonable to grant their pretensions; but it happens that the prophet is so minutely circumstantial in his description, that it effectually excludes any people or nation from being thereby intended, excepting the literal house of Israel, or natural seed of Jacob. Nothing, under the utmost violence done to the text, and a most unnatural meaning imposed on it, can give it a contrary sense. But certainly the liberty of imposing a sense and meaning on words different from that which they import according to their first and known acceptation and signification, is such a violation as ought never to be admitted.

For, if words are made use of as signs to denote our ideas, what a confusion and subversion of language must ensue, if a meaning contrary to that which the words stand as a known sign of, be arbitrarily imposed on them at pleasure? What is there, according to this scheme, that a person may not be made to say? But, as this is the greatest and grossest abuse of language, the bare mentioning of it is sufficient to expose its absurdity. However, I should be glad to know from whence the authority of imposing an opposite, contrary, or different sense on Scripture is derived. I am sure no such liberty would be allowed to any person; no, not even in the most common affairs of life. Ought not

the pretenders to this privilege (supposing in this prophecy) at least to have referred to some passage wherein mention is made of the houses of Israel and Judah, and showing the inconsistency and absurdity of applying these terms to the literal seed of Israel or Judah, or the Jewish nation, and then show their pertinency and exact agreement as applied to the Christian church? Was it for want of words in the Hebrew language, that the gentiles are called by that very name by which the Jews are always meant and intended? Can it be supposed that God would do that which must appear highly absurd in man? By no means; the very passage is plain and explicit against any such pretensions, and puts it out of all doubt, that none but the literal houses of Israel and Judah were intended. For the new covenant was to be made with those whose fathers the Lord brought up from the land of Egypt; with whose fathers He made a former covenant; with those whose fathers had broken that covenant, notwithstanding He had behaved like a husband unto them. Now pray, whom does this description fit,—the Jews or the gentiles? If the Jews, then it was with them that God was to make the new covenant; and as it is they, literally, to whom the preceding particulars are alone applicable, so it is with them literally that the covenant was to be made. But since the gentiles are so fond of being thought to be meant by the name of Israel, why do they not undertake to prove that it was not the ancestors of the Jews (literally) but theirs who entered into a former covenant—that it was not the fathers of the Jews (literally) who broke the covenant, and were punished, but theirs? and then, after they have properly made all this out, it will be time to put in for that name, and claim the privilege of

the new covenant. But, as it is natural to think they can never make out all this, they may, perhaps, make use of another invention, and pretend that the new covenant was to be spiritual. To this I answer that God made no such distinction; and, as the former covenant was worldly, so also must the new one be; for it particularizes things entirely of worldly nature,—particularly, that the house of Israel should never be cast off, nor cease to be a nation.

It may likewise be pretended that this covenant was to take place in heaven, and you may be referred to paradise for its accomplishment; it is but putting heaven for Jerusalem, an invention often made use of. To this I answer, that the prophet intimates the very contrary; and, lest any such pretension should be made, he carefully and minutely describes the earthly Jerusalem, and describes the tower Hanancel, the gates, the hill Gareb and Goath, the valley of dead bodies and of ashes, the fields, the brook Kidron, and the Horse-gate; all which puts it beyond dispute that he meant Jerusalem literally and not paradise nor heaven. Besides, the words “shall not be plucked up or thrown down any more for ever” imply that the place had been destroyed, which never could be said of a heavenly one.

In short, it seems as if God had carefully provided that his meaning should not be misapplied in any part of it, by circumstantially describing every particular; and that He has done so minutely, as strongly enforces his plain meaning in such a manner, as to render it impracticable, consistently, to apply this prophecy in any other sense.

These are the arts and evasions to which the most learned and eminent men have recourse; it is to these, and such like subterfuges, that they fly for shelter; it is from such

chimerical and vain pretensions, that they undertake to prove the fulfilling of prophecy. As they write to people of the same persuasion and way of thinking, it is very rare that their reasoning meets any opposition; but every thing they say, though ever so absurd, is received with applause and approbation, as if they had demonstratively proved their point, or convinced their opponents. They exult and sing *Te Deum* for their victory. They triumph and exclaim against the Jews for wilfully shutting their eyes and hardening their hearts against the plain arguments and dictates of truth,—concluding them to be under a national blindness, an infatuation. They will, indeed, invite people to make their objections; but wo then to the poor creatures who undertake the task; for they are to expect no quarter; heresy, infidelity, and apostacy, will be proved against them; and defamation and ill-language will certainly ensue; for they are generally very eloquent and expert at these weapons.

Allow me, sir, to ask one question, and this is: “Supposing a prophet had positive orders from God to promise and fulfil any thing which was to happen and befall the house of Israel or Judah, or their literal descendents; would it be possible for the prophet to deliver or make known God’s will, and reveal his purpose to them, in words and terms more significant and proper than those very words which the prophet has, in the passage now under consideration, delivered his commission in?” I challenge any person to do it in words more expressive and less liable to objections or exceptions; and if this be the case, as it certainly is, what reasons are there to think that when He has chosen the most unexceptionable terms, He has deceived those He

spoke to, and intended the contrary. Shall we impute that to God which we should condemn as the greatest absurdity and abuse in men?

LETTER XII.

THE best method, and indeed the only sure guide we have to come to the truth, is to examine the prophecies which are cited in the New, from the Old Testament, and applied as fulfilled by Jesus, and accomplished in him. It is by such an examination only that a true judgment can be formed of the validity of their application and accomplishment,—the prophecies being the only criterion by which the Messiah is to be known, since it is from them alone that his character must be proved; and we may be most certain that such evidence must be, not only superior, but the most sure, as St. Peter expresses it.* For what in nature can be superior to plain and clear prophecies delivered to different persons, and at different times, all unanimously and uniformly foretelling, so long before, that which should happen or come to pass,—being transactions so very extraordinary that, when duly attended to, the prophecies compared to the events, evidently, obviously, and literally fulfilled and accomplished, must be the highest testimony any thing can possibly be capable of? This task is therefore absolutely necessary, and I with pleasure undertake the examination.

1. The first prophecy taken from the Old Testament, and

* Peter i. 19.

applied in the New, is that which concerns the conception of Mary, and the birth of Jesus from a Virgin; which St. Matthew proves by applying a passage out of Isaiah :*—“ Now all this was done, (says he,) that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.”† Now it happens that the passage cited from Isaiah, according to its natural, plain, and obvious meaning, concerns neither the birth of Jesus from a virgin, nor the birth of the Messiah at all: this being no prophecy, the evangelist's citing it, as fulfilled, can prove nothing. This will plainly and evidently appear from a due consideration of the prophet's design and intention in the sign, and also from the nature of the sign, by him given to Ahaz, which was on the following occasion, viz.—In the days of Ahaz king of Judah, Rezin king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel, laid siege to Jerusalem, but could not prevail.” The two kings being disappointed, conclude a new alliance, and, with a greater force, agree to return again to the siege. This confederacy struck great panic and terror in the house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem. On this occasion Isaiah was sent by God to comfort Ahaz, and to assure him in his name, that the confederate kings should not prevail in their design; and in order to convince Ahaz of its certainty, the prophet, in God's name, tells him to ask a sign of him. The incredulous king excuses himself, under pretence of not tempting God. The prophet, after complaining of the king's behaviour, tells him that the Lord himself shall give him a sign, no doubt a clear, indisputable,

* Isaiah vii. 14.

† Matthew i. 23.

immediate sign, and such an one, as should effectually answer the intention and purpose for which it was given, viz: That a young woman, (for so the word *Almah* signifies,) should be delivered of a son, whose name should be called Immanuel; that before this child should know how to refuse the evil, or choose the good, that is, within a very short time, "The land which he abhorred should be forsaken of both her kings."* Now, it is plain as words can make it, that it was to convince Ahaz of the truth of the prophet's prediction, that this sign was given him from the Lord; and the nature of the sign given was most certainly calculated and adapted to answer the purpose for which it was given, viz: that it might be a proof of and testimony to the prophet's prediction; and so it effectually was; and it must have been the greatest absurdity, and contrary to the very intention of the sign, to have understood the prophet as St. Matthew does, describing here the conception of Mary, and the birth of her son Jesus,—an event which was not to happen till seven or eight hundred years after. For how could a sign, either of this pretended nature or so remote, have confirmed Ahaz in the hope and expectation, which the prophet gave him from the Lord, of the destruction of his two great enemies, within a very short time? But the certain foretelling of a birth of a male child, and the declaring that before it should have any knowledge, both the kings, his enemies, should be destroyed, appears a proper and well adapted sign; because it must have shortly verified the prophet's prediction. But a sign which was not to come to pass till upwards of seven or eight hundred years after,

* Isaiah vii. 2; and 2 Kings xvi.

could never answer the purpose; for how could it be a sign to the incredulous king, to prove that which was immediately to happen? For the incredulity of Ahaz was the occasion of God's giving him a sign. But how could that sign contribute to convince him, unless he saw the accomplishment? And if he disbelieved the promise from God in what was soon to happen, what credit could be expected he should give to an event so very remote? Would it not be the greatest absurdity for a person to foretell a thing as immediately, or soon coming to pass, and to give a sign, which should not come to pass for seven or eight hundred years after? When the thing foretold was over, could a sign at that distance be any proof or confirmation of the truth of the thing foretold? No, certainly, it must appear useless to every person, and rather a banter than a sign, and could only serve to add to the incredulity of those concerned.

On the other hand, nothing can be clearer than that the whole transaction was plainly fulfilled in the days of Ahaz, within the time limited by the prophet, before the child which was born could distinguish good from evil, or in about two years, as is evident from sacred history; for within that time the king of Syria was slain, after the taking of Damascus;* and the king of Israel was smitten by Hosea, who rebelled against him;† by which means the land which Ahaz abhorred was bereft of both her kings, which event fulfilled the prophet's prediction, for which the prophet's own child, (and not Jesus, as it is pretended,) was given as the sign.

* 2 Kings xvi. 9.

† Ibid. xv. 30.

That it was so, the prophet himself declares, by saying, "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of Hosts."* Thus was the sign given to convince Ahaz fulfilled, and the whole prophecy accomplished at that very time, and consequently it excludes all their pretensions. The word *Almah*, rendered "virgin" in the English Bible, signifies no more than a young woman, whether maid, married, or widow. When a virgin is intended, it is always expressed by the word *Bethulah*, which is the proper term for a virgin; this is evident from the word *Bethulah* being used for virgin throughout all Scripture.†

I cannot here forbear observing, how cautiously Father Calmet treats, and explains the word *Almah*. He trifles and imposes on his readers, and endeavours to hide from them, as much as lies in his power, its true meaning, by declaring, that, "The Hebrews had no term that more properly signifies a virgin than *Almah*;" for though he at last, (and as it were, contrary to his inclination,) is forced to confess the contrary, he does it in such a manner, as discovers his glaring chicanery; for he says, "It must be confessed, without lessening however the certainty of Isaiah's prophecy, that sometimes, by mistake, any young woman whatsoever, whether a virgin or not, is called *Almah*." Now observe: First he assures you, that, "The Hebrews have no term that more properly signifies a virgin, than *Almah*," which is evidently false; secondly, when he brings himself to the confession, "that any young woman whatsoever" is called by this name, he will have it to be by

* Isaiah viii. 18.

† Vide Gen. xxiv. 16; Levit. xxi. 3, 13; Deut. xxii. 23, 28, &c.

mistake, which is also false ; and lastly, for fear of prejudicing or lessening the authority of the application of Isaiah's prophecy by St. Matthew, he inserts a salvo by which he excepts the word in that place, not to mean any young woman whatsoever, but that it means a virgin. How vain, nay, how ridiculous are such shifts and evasions.*

Let us return : There are many Christian commentators, both ancient and modern, who do justice to this passage of Isaiah, and acknowledge that the whole must be literally understood of his own son, who was made the sign to Ahaz, and was consequently accomplished in his days ; and then content themselves, either with making Isaiah's son to be a type of Jesus, or with barely contending for an accommodation of phrases, made use of here by the evangelist. But as neither of these inventions is of weight, or proves any thing, it makes others, who are not at all pleased with the aforesaid methods of accounting for the evangelist's saying that a thing was fulfilled when in fact it was not, endeavour, by various shifts and wretched evasions, to extend this passage of Isaiah to the miraculous conception of a virgin, and birth of Jesus. These always take for granted, that the term *Almah* means a virgin. At all this you must not be surprised ; for on such occasions, let the passage be ever so plain, they must endeavour to fix on some other meaning, and make it out some way or other ; this they will always do rather than give up a point so essential, and on which they place the very foundation of the Christian religion.

The authors of the *Universal History* furnish you with a very remarkable instance, who, having put their own sense on the prophecy, that the sceptre should not depart from

* See Calmet *Dict.* on the word *Almah*.

Judah, till Shiloh come to put an end to the kingdom,* they tell you that the desponding king (Ahaz) could not be ignorant of it; as if the wise authors knew, and were certain, that Ahaz believed this prophecy of Jacob in the sense given to that passage by Christians, after the establishment of Christianity; when on the contrary, it very evidently and plainly appears, that the sense of the whole Jewish church and nation, not excepting even Jesus himself, the evangelist, and apostles, who never made use of, or applied that prophecy in any sense whatever, (a plain proof that they never understood it in the sense since given it,) must ever have been against any such application or explanation; for they did always ardently wish for, and expect the Messiah, as the greatest blessing and happiness that could befall them; consequently they either did not believe Shiloh to be the Messiah; or if they did believe the Messiah to be thereby meant, it must have been in a very different sense, since the restoring of the kingdom and nation was that which they expected at his coming; otherwise, instead of joyfully expecting him as the greatest blessing, they would have had cause to dread his coming. Therefore Ahaz's fears could never have proceeded from that passage; for if he knew any thing of that passage, he must have considered it in a different sense; and it is much more probable, that he had but little faith in prediction, to which he seems to have paid but little regard, as appears from the whole history of his life.

It is surprising therefore, that the learned authors should explain this passage by building on so inconsistent and so false a foundation; asserting as they do, "that this Shiloh

* Universal History, Vol. iv. p. 153.

promised to Judah and David, who was to forerun the total excision of the Jewish polity, was to be born in a miraculous manner, and with a divine character, and other remarkable circumstances." But all this is a mere ramble of the authors' own invention, and has no foundation at all, nor any connexion with Isaiah's prophecy; for the authors speak of matters which could not be given for signs, either to Ahaz or to any other persons: no, not even to those who should live in the time of this pretended miraculous birth. Therefore such signs must have been useless, and consequently could answer no purpose at all; for how could that be given for a sign, which according to the nature and frame of things, could never be made manifest, it being impracticable to evidence the virginity of any woman? Take me right, I am not here speaking against the possibility of the thing, that not being the question at present; but what I urge is, the uselessness of such a sign; because it was of that nature, as made it impracticable to be wrought in a manner capable to answer the purpose for which alone a sign can be given, that is, conviction.

I am therefore only clearing and defending the prophet from having any such design; for such a sign and miracle, being by the nature of things invisible, could never have been intended as a proof of that which should come to pass; the same being actually contrary to the manner of God's performing his miracles on all other occasions. For unless they were manifest and public, how could they be attended to, or how could the people be convinced by them?

The same objections may also be urged against the conception of a woman without the concurrence of a man: the

possibility of the thing is not here the question ; but the impossibility of the same being made manifest, or evident, is all I contend for, and which is sufficient for my purpose. I need not urge the different accounts given by Matthew and Luke ; from which many objections might be made ; but there are some expressions, such as “ The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee,”* which I should be glad to have explained according to the rules of language ; for as they stand, they may possibly introduce into unwary and ignorant minds ideas very unbecoming God, or the Holy Ghost ; at least it may be thought to give too great a sanction to stories feigned and invented by the heathens, concerning the amours of their gods, with which their poets sometimes diverted themselves : Homer in particular, very agreeably exposes Mars and Venus, when Vulcan caught them in his net.†

But whether this be so or not, let us now return to the authors of the Universal History. They say, “ As for that part of the prophecy, which is commonly urged on the other side, namely, before this wonderful child shall know good from evil, the land which thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings,” they think that by this ought to be understood, not the land of Syria and Israel, the land which Ahaz abhorred, and which was to be forsaken of both her kings, viz. Rezin and Pekah, his two great enemies, but the land of Judah and Israel, which should be forsaken of both her kings before the coming of the Messiah ; thus they pretend to make a new version of the text. How stupid must the commentators of so many centuries have been, not

* Luke i. 35.

† See the eighth Book of the Odyssey.

to have found out this? But facts are stubborn things, and the destruction of Rezin and Pekah by violent deaths, within the time limited by the prophet, puts it beyond dispute what kings they were whom the prophet meant.

I must not pass in silence the art which the before-mentioned historians make use of to prejudice and blind their readers; by inserting the word *WONDERFUL*, cited as if it was in the text, which only says, "For before the child shall know how to refuse the evil and choose the good."* By this means they endeavour to make Jesus to be this wonderful child. But supposing the prophet had said this *wonderful* child, how could he be proved to be so? since it is impossible to do it, either from the conception of a woman without the concurrence of a man, or from the nature of virginity; both these being hidden and invisible. Had his birth any thing wonderful, or was his person so? As for his birth, for any thing that appears, it seems to have been the same as that of other babes; being formed in his mother's womb, in the due course of time, and brought forth into the world in the common manner. He does not appear to have been endowed with any thing superior to other babes, and he required the same nourishment and nursing; and as to his person, no doubt it was fashioned like other babes; nothing is recorded of any thing extraordinary in his body, be that as handsome or perfect as they please. So that in all things he appeared like other children that were begot in the common way, and he grew in like manner as other children do, and no person, from his fashion or make, ever thought otherwise. From all which particulars one may

* Isaiah Chap. vii. 16.

with certainty draw a very fair and natural inference, and that is, as he appeared in his birth, shape and growth, like other men, so nothing which can be alleged, will be sufficient to prove that he was not got by the same usual means as others are.

This natural inference being founded on facts and ocular demonstration, no evidence can be superior to it; since it must always outweigh any other proof, unless it could be made as demonstrable and visible to our senses. For this reason some Christians believe that he was Joseph's son; but be that as it may, they cannot pretend to impose him upon us as a *wonderful* child. One may indeed, with Doctor Echart, admire, and "see the profound humility of our blessed Saviour, who chose not to descend from heaven with the glories of a triumphant monarch and deliverer, but privately to enter into the womb of a mean virgin; from thence to be brought forth as an infant; and then to appear in the world in the form of the lowest rank of mankind."* I produce not this passage to make any observations, but only to strengthen what I have asserted, viz. that nothing wonderful, as is pretended, appeared, or was visible in him; and that consequently these historians misrepresent the whole transaction which concerns the birth of Isaiah's child, (as appears from the history of those times,) given as a sign to Ahaz, which was accomplished in those days. Therefore the evangelist's saying, "that it might be fulfilled," &c. citing this passage, is at most but an accommodation of phrases, and does not say that any thing was thereby fulfilled.

* *Introduct. to Eccle. History*, p. 42.

In like manner we shall find, as we proceed farther in this examination, many other citations, made and accommodated to things which the places from whence they are cited could have no reference to, according to their plain sense and meaning; so that not being literally applied, they cannot be proof of any thing.

I must beg pardon for having troubled you with so long a letter, and have no other excuse but that it was required from the importance of the subject, which drew me to this length, notwithstanding I forebore saying and remarking many things, as you may easily guess I might have done on so copious a subject. But I shall conclude with one, and that is, that no use was ever made by Jesus of his being wonderfully conceived or born, nor offered by him as any proof of his being the Messiah; which shows that these transactions could not be intended as any proof of him, or his office, and are consequently useless.

LETTER XIII.

II. THE next prophecy cited by Matthew, as fulfilled in Jesus, is concerning the place of his birth, and greatness. The place referred to is in Micah :* “ And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah : for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.”† This is said to be the

* Micah v. 2.

† Matt. ii. 6.

answer made to Herod by the chief priests and scribes, when he inquired of them concerning the place of the Messiah's birth; both he and all Jerusalem being troubled at the news published by the eastern wise men, of having seen his star in the east, by which they knew of the birth of the king of the Jews.* This is the account transmitted to us of this affair. But in this whole transaction there seem some things, not only very improbable, but even incredible:—such as that Herod should gather the chief priests and scribes to ask such a question, and that they should return him such an answer;—that an extraordinary star should appear in the east; or that its appearance should be known to be a notification of the birth of a child in Judea; that the wise men should take a long journey to no purpose;—that the star should make its appearance to people who were nowise concerned in the birth of the king of the Jews, and not to the Jews themselves, who were the people chiefly interested;—that Jerusalem should be troubled at an event, which must have been a matter of great joy and comfort to them;†—that an assembly of chief priests and scribes should fix the place where their glorious king should be born, when it seems to have been an established principle among them, that they were not to know the place of the Messiah's birth,‡ since there have followed many pretenders to that character, without being born at Bethlehem; and lastly, that the star which the wise men had seen in the east, should again appear to them when they had parted from Herod, march before them, and make a stand “Over where

* Matt. ii. 1-4

† Luke ii. 10.

‡ John vii. 27.

the child was,"* for no manner of purpose; since we hear no more of these wise men, nor of any use that was made of their journey;—all which seems to be such a piece of extravagance, and such a continued series of impossibilities and incredibilities, as nothing can equal. For how could people, acquainted with the vast magnitude of the stars, (for wise they were,) think that one went before them, to show them their way from house to house? And since the star must necessarily have travelled from the east, where it first appeared, to Jerusalem, where the wise men again found it,—for it was the same star† which guided them to the place where the child was,—why did not the star guide them directly from the place they set out from to Bethlehem? for the guidance of the star from Jerusalem appears needless, since Herod had directed them before. Besides, so extraordinary a phenomenon must have drawn the attention of the whole city, and numbers of other people would have followed it as well as the wise men, had it been seen; but of this the story takes no manner of notice. All the aforesaid considerations make it probable, that the whole was invented to make way for the application of this and two other passages as fulfilled; for, as this gospel of Matthew's was written for the use of the Jews, and they believing that the character of the Messiah could only be proved by prophecy, and finding none in the prophets applicable to him, according to their plain, obvious meaning, facts were invented, to have an opportunity of introducing something as having been fulfilled. This is only a conjecture of my own; but whether it was really so in fact or not, it is cer-

* Matt. ii. 9.

† Matt. ii. 9.

tain that this citation could never be any description of Jesus; the whole passage as it is in Micah, is, throughout, very justly and judiciously applied to Zerubbabel; and every circumstance in the description excludes Jesus from being thereby meant, or intended, since the person there spoken of, "was to be a ruler in Israel;" and farther the prophet declares, "that this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land, and when he shall tread into our palaces; then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof; thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders." "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD," &c. See the whole chapter, and the impossibility of applying it to Jesus literally. For unless it be so according to its primary sense and meaning, it can neither be deemed to be fulfilled, nor produced to prove any thing.

III. One of the passages, or prophecies, which is cited by St. Matthew, and said by him to be fulfilled, in consequence of the needless discovery made to Herod by the wise men, is the following, and is the next which the said evangelist cites. It is from that discovery that he tells us, how that Joseph dreamed that an angel appeared to him, and ordered him to flee with the child and its mother into Egypt, which being done, he says, "that he was there till the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled what was spoken of the LORD, by the prophet saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son."* These words are taken from Hosea, where

* Matt. ii. 15.

they very evidently appear not to be prophetic, but to have relation to a past action, viz., the call of the children of Israel out of Egypt. The prophet's words are, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt;"* so that this passage could not be fulfilled in Jesus's return, according to the literal meaning of it. Give me leave to observe, that Luke in all these things contradicts Matthew; for according to him, they brought Jesus to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, and to offer the appointed sacrifice;† where "when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth,"‡ which, if true, Matthew must be out in his whole narration.

IV. The other passage or prophecy which I think to be cited by Matthëw, and said by him to be fulfilled in consequence of the discovery which the wise men made to Herod, is the following, being the next cited by him, on occasion of the slaughter which, he says, Herod made of the babes in Bethlehem, and the coasts thereof, from two years and under. "Then (says he) was fulfilled, that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentations, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and would not be comforted, because they are not."§ This passage is taken from Jeremiah,|| and it evidently and plainly relates to the sufferings of the ten tribes, and their glorious return, according to its obvious literal sense, as is evident from the whole chapter. Indeed to apply "and they shall come again from the land of the enemy,"¶ to the slaughter of

* Hosea xi. 1.

† Luke ii. 21-24.

‡ Ibid. ii. 39.

§ Matt. ii. 16-18.

|| Jer. xxxi. 12.

¶ Ibid. 16.

the babes, must appear to be a very great absurdity. This is so plain, that Father Calmet declares : “ As to what St. Matthew says that at the time, when the innocents were massacred, the accomplishment was seen of this prophecy by Jeremiah ; ‘ a voice was heard in Rama,’ &c., it is our opinion, that the primary sense of this prophecy relates to the carrying away of the ten tribes into captivity ; and that St. Matthew accommodated it to the circumstances in question.”* And in another place it is said : “ St. Matthew has made an application of this passage, of the mourning of Rachel, to the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem by Herod. But it is plain, that that was not the literal and historical sense of this passage of Jeremiah ;”† so that this is not literally to fulfill the prophecy.

I am confirmed in my conjecture, that the story of the wise men was invented, to usher in the accommodation of the three last cited prophecies, and citing them as fulfilled by way of allusion, from Luke’s silence in all these matters, and his giving a very different relation of things. For he is entirely silent as to the story of the wise men and the star which appeared to them, and was their guide, and, in its place, substitutes the story of the shepherds who kept watch ;‡ to which you may turn for your edification. I have observed before his differing also concerning the journey to Egypt. So, neither does he make mention of the massacre of the innocents by Herod, which to do him justice he could not have consistently done ; because Jesus was born when Cyrenius was made governor of Syria, that

* Calmet’s Dict. on the word Innocents.

† Ibid. on the word Rama.

‡ Luke ii. 8–20.

is long after Herod's death,* Judea (as Josephus observes) being already annexed to Syria; "For it was Cyrenius's province to tax and assess those people, and make seizure of the moneys and moveables of Archelaus."† It was on this occasion, that Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to be taxed. "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished, that she should be delivered; and she brought forth her firstborn son;"‡ so that it was a grand mistake to place the birth of Jesus under Herod. But had he been born in Herod's life, it must appear very surprising and incredible, that none but Matthew should relate this most barbarous and inhuman act. Josephus is very circumstantial, and very particularly describes the cruelties which this barbarous king committed; and yet says not a word concerning this bloody deed, which he would most certainly have related had it been true; for he was never sparing of his character. It is mere trifling to pretend, as some do, that Josephus purposely concealed this butchery, to avoid giving countenance to the evangelist.§ For, supposing he had recorded it, it could only prove that Herod was grown jealous from the information given him; but it could never be a proof, that the king, whom the Jews expected as Messiah, was really born. Because the proof of this must have depended not on the information, and the slaughter which ensued, but on the accomplishment of those things which he, according to the prophecies, was to perform. But surely they cannot, and dare not tax St. Luke, with having any such design; yet 'tis plain, from his plac-

* Luke ii. 2

† Basnage; Jos. Ant. B. xviii. ch. i.

‡ Luke ii. 4-8.

§ Universal Hist. Vol. x. p. 495.

ing the birth of Jesus when Cyrenius was governor of Syria, (that is, when Judea was made a province of his government, which happened after the death of Herod,) that Jesus, could not be born during his reign; and the argument in this particular of Josephus and Luke's, together with the silence of this evangelist in all these affairs, and his never mentioning any thing to have happened under Herod, is equal to a demonstration against the facts as recorded by Matthew.

LETTER XIV.

V. THE next citation made by St. Matthew, and said by him to be fulfilled, is the following: "And he came and dwelt in a city, called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."* But as none of the prophets declare any such thing, or have any such passage, nothing could thereby be literally fulfilled; for his dwelling in the city of Nazareth could not denominate him a Nazarene or Nazarite; because this term denotes a person's being under a particular vow;† and none could be called by that name unless he was actually under the vow. Commentators puzzle themselves, and are at a loss to find out the place referred to, to make out the fulfilling mentioned by the evangelist; to this end they have recourse to, and make such shifts, as shows their

* Matt. ii. 3.

† Consult Numb. vi.

perplexities, the reading of which has often made me smile. As I am only showing that the passages, or prophecies, said to be fulfilled in Jesus, are not literally applied, and none pretending that this is literally fulfilled, it is not my place to take notice, or make any remarks on what they say concerning this passage. But the solution of Doctor Echard is certainly very curious, who after relating Jesus' return to his former habitation, adds, "which being a mean and despicable place, it afterwards gained Jesus the reproachful title of a Nazarene, according to the aim and turn of several prophecies, as St. Matthew observes."* But here the Doctor is mistaken, for the title of Nazarene was honourable, being the term by which those under a special and religious vow were called, and which none despised, nor *was it given* by way of reproach. This he very well knew, as also, that his dwelling in Nazareth could not denominate him to be what he was not, a Nazarene, or Nazarite; for we never heard that he was under that vow. Had the evangelist cited, as fulfilled, any particular passage, declarative that Jesus should dwell in the city of Nazareth, he might then have called him Jesus of Nazareth, but to call him a Nazarene, † because he dwelt in Nazareth, and for such circum-

* Ecclestiac. Hist. Vol. i. p. 7.

† Mr. Dias seems to take the terms Nazarene and Nazarite as synonymous. This they certainly are not, as the one would signify a person who belongs to Nazar, therefore an inhabitant of that place; but the term Nazarite is a corruption of the word Nahzeer, or one who has taken a vow of separation for the time being from wine and all manner of uncleanness. The error, however, is referable to the author of the gospel more than to Dias, as he evidently meant to call Jesus one separated from the world at large. But, as is observed in the text, no such passage as to make him a Nazarene or Nazarite does any where exist in our Bible.—ED. Oc.

stances to say the prophecies are fulfilled, seems very extraordinary.

VI. The next citation made by St. Matthew concerns the preaching of John. "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight."* But the context of *the text whence* this citation is taken, very evidently shows, that John was not the person spoken of. For it says, "Comfort, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins,"† which verses precede that cited by St. Matthew. Now what comfort it was that John brought to the Jews and Jerusalem, has not yet been made out. How could their warfare be accomplished, when the greatest vengeance was at that time to be poured out? how could their iniquities have been pardoned, when it is said, that at that very time they contracted the highest guilt? or how could the prophet declare that they had received double for all their sins, when the greatest punishment was still to be inflicted on them? from which circumstances in the prophecy, it is plain that this passage is not literally cited, *at least* not literally fulfilled. For the prophecy is, according to its plain obvious meaning, declarative of times and circumstances entirely different from those which came to pass at that time, therefore it could not relate to John.

VII. The next citation made by St. Matthew is to prove

* Matt. iii. 3.

† Isaiah xl. 1-2

that Jesus' removal from Nazareth, and settling at Capernaum, was foretold. "This Jesus did, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying :

MATTHEW iv. 15, 16.

"The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, *by* the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

ISAIAH ix. 1, 2.

"Nevertheless, the dimness *shall* not *be* such as *was* in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict *her by* the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

I have put the citation and text in different columns, that you may see the difference. The prophet's plain meaning is, to declare the joy which the inhabitants of those regions should have, in the midst of their sorrow and affliction, occasioned by the army of the king of Syria, which was to be totally vanquished, whilst they were to be delivered from their dreadful enemy; which event relates no more to the removal of Jesus from one place to another, than it does to your removal from London and dwelling in Naples.

VIII. The next prophecy cited by St. Matthew, and said to be fulfilled by Jesus, in his casting out devils, and healing all the sick. His words are: "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick; that it might be fulfilled, what

was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses,"* which citation, thus said to be fulfilled, is this: "Surely he hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrows."† Now, whoever can, from this passage of the prophet, draw a sense, importing the casting out devils out of men's bodies, and the healing of sicknesses, must do it by the help of some uncommon rule, or art, to us unknown; for, literally, it can mean no such thing. But supposing it did mean, that a person should cure the sick, and cast out devils, and that it was really fulfilled by Jesus' performing these cures literally, must it not upset some people's reasoning, who extend the same passage to the cure of sin, and spiritual infirmities, by his death? for if it be fulfilled (literally I mean) in the one case, then it cannot be literally fulfilled in the other; and the pretending it to mean spiritual cures must, of course, be contrary to St. Matthew, who says the passage was fulfilled by those bodily cures. I think Doctor Echard seems to have been sensible of this, and therefore says, (by what authority I know not,) that it was, "In some measure accomplishing the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, He took our infirmities upon himself, and bore our diseases."‡ Now I wish the learned Doctor had told us by what rule or means he found this out in the prophet's saying, not infirmities and diseases, as he does, but grief and sorrows.§ He ought also to have told us the rea-

* Matt. viii. 16, 17. † Isaiah liii. 4. ‡ Eccle. Hist. Vol. i. p. 89.

§ There is a note appended to the above in the MS. of the letters, probably by the transcriber, in these words: "Notwithstanding the remark made on Dr. Echard's version on the text, the Hebrew will very well bear that sense, *i. e.* infirmities or disease. The other remark has more weight." Thus far the note; only there should have been sug-

son why it was only "in some measure accomplished," and not actually fulfilled, as the evangelist, (who I suppose knew as much of the matter as he) says it was. For if it was not actually fulfilled, it must be absurd in St. Matthew to say it was, and proving it by referring to the passage, which he could only do with that intention. For otherwise how shall we know from the use of that term, and from the citing or referring to a passage said to be fulfilled, whether it be so or not?

Is not this striking at the authority of the evangelist? Thus much for this passage, which let them settle it in what manner they will, it is not certain, that "he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" can ever be fulfilled by casting out devils and curing diseases. I mean literally; for as to a fulfilling in a different sense, I have nothing to do with.

IX. The next citation made by St. Matthew is, when Jesus in order to persuade the people to believe that John was Elias, says, "And if ye will receive it, this was Elias which was for to come."† The promise and purpose of Elias' coming you will find in Malachi: "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."§ This was a great and glorious work, which that great prophet

gested that the Hebrew words ought to be rendered "diseases and pains." At all events, let the translation be as it may, the fulfilment was not according to the prophecy; for it says there "he bore," not "removed them."—ED. OC.

* Matt. xi. 14.

† Malachi iv. 5, 6.

was to be sent to do, and to be employed in; and it should not be wondered that the Jews, on a promise so express, should found the hope of Elias' or Elijah's coming for this, so desirable and beneficent a purpose; at least those, who on another occasion, do firmly believe, that not only Elias, but Moses too, did really come down from heaven in a bodily shape, (for how otherwise could the disciples know it was they, or to what end should they desire to build a tabernacle for their abode?*) to answer no purpose at all that we know of, ought not to be surprised at their having such hopes. But be that as it will, thus much is certain, Elias or Elijah was promised to be sent, that is, a person who bore that name, and was so called; consequently, neither John's nor any other person's coming can be deemed a literal fulfilling of the promise.

X. The next citation made by St. Matthew, and said by him to be fulfilled by Jesus, is the cures that he wrought on the multitude of his followers, and his charging them not to make it known: "All this happened," says St. Matthew, "that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul was well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the gentiles trust."† This citation is made from Isaiah,‡ with some difference, particularly the

* Matt. xvii. 1-4; Mark ix. 4, 5; Luke ix. 30-33.

† Matt. xii. 15-21.

‡ Isaiah xlii. 1-4.

last sentence, "And in his name shall the gentiles trust," which is an addition of the evangelist's. I confess, that considering the citation, and what is said thereby to be fulfilled, I cannot comprehend the least resemblance, nor find the least connexion to the matter intended; for how can the passage cited be said to be fulfilled, either by the multitude's following Jesus, or by his healing them, or by his charging them not to make him known? Can the passage cited be fulfilled by his doing those things, when it mentions nothing like it? I know that it is pretended, "that by the secrecy which Jesus imposed on those he cured, the passage is fulfilled, because it represents his quiet, humble, and meek temper."* To this I answer, that his imposing silence on those he cured, did not proceed from his quiet, humble, and meek disposition, but from other motives; and for the truth of this I appeal to Dr. Echard himself,† to Mr. Lock,‡ and to the authors of the Universal History,§ who assign very different motives for his imposing secrecy; therefore this citation neither proves one thing nor the other to be thereby fulfilled.

* Echard's *Eccles. Hist.* Vol. i. p. 96, 97. † *Ibid.* 89-90.

‡ *Reas. of Chris.* ed. 4, Vol. ii. p. 522, 523. § *Uni. Hist.* Vol. x. p. 558.

LETTER XV.

XI. THE next citation made by St. Matthew is occasioned by Jesus' speaking in parables, that he might not be understood by the people he spoke to, lest otherwise they should understand him, and be by that means converted and healed; for though it is pretended that he came to save, yet, as St. John says, they were to have their eyes blinded, and their hearts hardened, "that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart."* "Therefore (says St. Matthew of Jesus) speak I to them in parable; because, they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive."† The prophecy said here to be fulfilled, relates, according to its plain sense and meaning, to the obstinacy of the people in his own time, to those to whom he spoke;‡ consequently it has not the least relation to those who lived in the time of Jesus, and is therefore no literal fulfilling; and indeed it could be no fault of the Jews that they were not converted, being not only blinded and hardened, but spoken to in such a way that it was impossible for them to understand.

XII. St. Matthew makes another citation, and says it was fulfilled by Jesus' speaking in parables: "All these

* John xii. 40.

† Matt. xiii. 13, 14.

‡ Isa. vi. 9 to the end.

things (says he) spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables, and without a parable spake he not unto them."

Matt. xiii. 35.—"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." Psalm lxxviii. 2, 3.—"I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us."

You have in different columns the citation, and the place from which it is cited, by which it appears, that nothing is thereby fulfilled, neither has the psalm any thing in it which can be extended or made in anywise applicable to the Messiah, as it concerns things past; besides this, the evangelist has adulterated the text, and qualified it to his purpose, which, to say no worse, is unfair.

XIII. The next prophecy, said by St. Matthew to be fulfilled by Jesus, concerns his entry into Jerusalem; it is also mentioned by the other three evangelists, who refer to the same prophecy cited from Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Jerusalem; shout, O daughter of Zion; behold thy King cometh unto thee; he is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass."* I think it is not of much importance to settle on what sort of a beast it was that Jesus made this his triumphant entry into the capital of his kingdom; you may, if you please, follow St. Matthew, and believe he sat both on the colt and ass; or you may follow Mark and Luke, who say it was on a colt; or, if you please, let it be with St. John, the ass alone. You may also believe this evangelist, when he tells you that the beast

* Zech. ix. 9.

was found by Jesus, and not sent for on purpose, as the others pretend. And in respect to the different discourses which are related to have passed between the owner of the beast and those who went for it, you may follow and believe that which you think most probable. Jesus having got the beast, or, as St. Matthew says, the ass and colt, the disciples put their clothes on them, and then set Jesus thereon. To see a king thus mounted, a great concourse of people was gathered; for certainly such a cavalcade must have been worth the seeing: and that it might be alike grand in all things, "A very great multitude spread their garments in the way, others cut down branches of trees, and strewed them in the way; multitudes going before, others following, crying, Hosannah!" "All this (says St. Matthew) was done that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, behold thy King cometh unto thee," &c.* "Hereby (as Dr. Echard very justly observes) giving him those honours that were used only in the triumphs of kings and emperors,"†—with which Jesus seems not to have been in any great degree transported; for we are assured by the same learned Doctor, that he "did not repair to the palace."‡ But to give the people a just taste of his power, and to show his authority, he drove out all the buyers and sellers from their places, overthrew the table of the money-changers, and the stalls of the dove-sellers. Thus he manifested his power, and his subjects their passive obedience; for we do not hear that they made any resistance: and if happiness consists in

* Matt. xxi. See also Mark xi., Luke xix., John xii.

† Eccl. Hist. p. 169.

‡ Ibid. p. 107.

triumphs, great acclamations, and being honoured like kings and emperors, or in the exercise of unlimited power, we may say that Jesus was the greatest temporal monarch upon the earth; for all these he had in the highest degree, though all this exaltation seems entirely inconsistent with the meek, low, and humble disposition which always accompanied his actions, and by which it is said the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled: "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall he make any man hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench;"* which I think may as well be applied here, as to the place where the evangelist has placed it, and in both places with equal propriety. Be that as it will, this his greatness was but of very short duration; for it is plain, that this famous cavalcade, and his refusing to silence and disperse the mob when he was ordered, soon brought him unto his untimely end; for by taking on himself so much power, state, and pomp, and by the encouraging of the mob to proclaim him king,† it gave the priests and scribes an opportunity to accuse him; for from his behaviour, and the unruliness of the frantic mob, they rightly inferred "that if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans (hearing that a king was set up) shall come and take away both our place and nation: therefore it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."‡ This seemingly political advice was, it seems, the dictates of the Holy Ghost,§ and was spoken by the spirit of prophecy, being suited also to the

* Matt. xii. 19.

† John xi. 48-50.

‡ Luke xix. 37-40.

§ Ibid. 51.

circumstances which the nation was then in; therefore it was necessary, for the preservation of the whole, to lay hold of this so fair a pretence which Jesus furnished them with on this occasion, and prevent the impending mischief; all which was very natural and consistent,—an advice not unworthy to be dictated by God or the Holy Ghost. But to take this speech of Caiaphas, as a prophecy, that Jesus ought to be put to death for the nation, in any other sense, is a very great absurdity; for can there be a greater contradiction, than to pretend that for following this advice (which as coming from God must have been good) the whole nation was condemned and doomed to destruction, instead of being saved, for performing that which the Holy Ghost directed? Nothing can be more inconsistent. Excuse^e this digression, and let us return. A person's riding upon an ass, or any other beast, can never be a sure mark of the Messiah; because this would be a circumstance within any pretender's power to fulfil: did the proof of his character depend upon such a cavalcade, how liable to counterfeits would we be? This then is no prophecy of the Messiah, but of Zerubbabel; and cannot be literally fulfilled in Jesus, since Jesus was no king, neither was his appearance any matter of rejoicing to Jerusalem, but much the contrary, as they pretend; for instead of the promised victory and defence,* war and desolation followed; and the prophecy therefore could not be literally fulfilled in Jesus.

XIV. The next citation made by St. Matthew, and said by him to be fulfilled, concerns Judas returning the thirty pieces of silver, with which was bought the potter's field. "Then

* See the remainder of the 9th chapter of Zechariah.

(says the evangelist) was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me."* It happens somewhat unluckily, that the saying of Jeremy is nowhere to be found, and is therefore invented. Neither is any such saying to be found in all the prophets. In Zechariah, there is a passage concerning thirty pieces of silver given to the prophet as a recompense, which he, by God's command, returned to the treasurer of the temple.† The translators of the New Testament refer to this passage; but this is contrary to the thing intended by the evangelist; for he represents it as a prophecy spoken or foretold, which the passage in Zechariah is not; for there it is presented to us as an act, and not as a thing prophetically spoken of or foretold. Besides, what has the prophet's receiving thirty pieces of silver for his price, and returning them by God's command, to do with Judas' selling or betraying his master, and returning the price of his iniquity in a remorse of conscience? or what has the treasurer's receiving it for the service of the temple, to do with the chief priest's refusing to put those returned by Judas in the treasury, and purchasing a field to bury strangers? In short, there is no such prophecy in the whole Bible, and therefore none can be said to be fulfilled; besides, it is quoted from Jeremy, where there is no mention made of the whole matter; it is therefore invented.

XV. The next citation, and the last contained in St.

* Matt. xxvii. 3-10.

† Zech. xi. 13.

Matthew's gospel, and said by him to be fulfilled, is the circumstance of dividing Jesus' vestments; "That it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots,—"*alluding to one of the Psalms, that which plainly appears, from its contents, to have been composed by David under the utmost affliction and distress,† probably after he had fled from Jerusalem. His expressions are adapted throughout his Psalms to the circumstances he was then in, describing at the same time his trust in God and his prayer to be delivered. Therefore to imagine that on such an occasion he prophesied or was foretelling how the Roman soldiers were to divide Jesus' garments, appears not only very absurd, but quite foreign and trifling, and cannot be made to answer any end at all; for surely none will place the proof of a Messiah on such a circumstance; and the whole having relation to David himself, no part can be by any other circumstance literally fulfilled.

 LETTER XVI.

XVI. HAVING in my four last letters examined all the quotations produced by St. Matthew, and said by him to be fulfilled in Jesus, and found them not to be so, in their proper, plain and literal sense: you will, I am sure, excuse

* Matt. xxvii. 35. Ps. xxii. 18.

† 2 Sam. xv. 13-17, and 30-32. Ibid. xvi. 5-14.

my not doing the like by the other quotations in the other evangelists, as it would be not only tedious, but would occasion you a needless expense for postage. However, I can with truth assure you that, having carefully examined every one of them, they all appear to me to be such, as either do not concern the Messiah, or are not applied according to their literal sense and plain obvious meaning. This you will soon find, if you will be at the trouble of comparing the passages, said to be fulfilled, with their plain meaning in the prophet; the very same fate happens to those quoted in other parts of the New Testament. There is one, however, which I shall treat on, in this letter, that deserves our attention; because it is famous with some people, and is produced, as one that is plainly accomplished and fulfilled in Jesus.

The passage I mean is twice alluded to, and quoted in the Acts.* “I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words into his mouth, and he shall speak unto them, all that I shall command him.”† From hence Dr. Leland concludes, that “Moses tells the people, that God would raise up from among them a prophet like unto him; that is, not an ordinary prophet, but one of peculiar eminence; that should, like Moses, give them laws in the name of God himself, and to whom they were indispensably obliged to hearken, and to pay an entire obedience.”‡ Had this learned divine pointed out the particulars, by which Jesus distinguished himself to be this eminent person, prophet, and lawgiver, like Moses, he had done something to the purpose; and then we

* Acts iii. 22.

† Deut. xviii. 15.

‡ Divine Authority, Vol. I. p. 100.

should be enabled to judge of their exact agreement and likeness. This he has not done; but this is what I shall now examine; and as we have on record the principal actions of both, it is not difficult to make the comparison. But first I must observe, that Moses, having nothing foretold, either concerning his person, or character, had, consequently, no description to answer; so that this circumstance *alone* makes a wide difference in the character of Moses and that of the Messiah. Had there been any description of Moses, he must undoubtedly have, in a very exact manner, answered that description, or it would have been vain and absurd in him, to have expected to be received by the people. Moses therefore, proceeds on a very different plan. To draw the attention of those to whom he was sent, he discovers his commission; in confirmation of which, and to engage them, he wrought sundry miracles; and at last happily executed his promise, in delivering the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage. Then it was, and not till then, that the people were convinced, that he was a person sent from God for that purpose. It was his performing this essential part of his commission and promise, that wrought in them this belief. "Thus the LORD saved Israel, that day, out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore; and Israel saw that great work, which the LORD did upon the Egyptians and the people feared the LORD, and believed in the LORD, and Moses his servant,"* Now had Moses failed in the essential part of his commission—could or would any of his miracles, however stupendous, have proved him to have been sent from

* Exod. xiv. 30, 31.

God with such a commission? Certainly not. And as it was absolutely necessary, that Moses should accomplish the delivery of the Israelites, according to his promise: so it was necessary, that the Messiah should perform those things, which are foretold concerning him. His character and office we have a description of; therefore, whoever pretends to it must, undoubtedly, answer it, and must never be received, until he attests his character by fulfilling the prophecies, which describe—him, the prophecies being, as I have proved, the test, or touchstone, by which alone those he was promised to were to judge, if he were the person therein described or not. The most stupendous wonders and splendid miracles would not, in this case, afford any proof of his character, because it had no dependence on them. It must stand or fall, according as his actions agreed, or disagreed with the prophecies, or as he did or did not fulfill them.

If Jesus' pretensions were true, he ought to have performed, and done those things, which were foretold; and in so doing, have given an undeniable proof. This would have convinced the people, that he was the promised person, beyond all objections; and he would then have acted consistently. The character of the Messiah, you will find in my sixth letter, (which see) collected from the prophecies their mentioned. The following is a short description or epitome of his office: "And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth."* This was the criterion

* Isaiah xi. 12.

given, by which the people were to judge, and distinguish him from all pretenders. In this description there is no room left to cavil; his office is described as it concerns the nations, for whom he is to "set up an ensign," that they might enter, and be partakers of the blessing of his government; and next we have his office as it concerns the Jews, and what he was do for them, viz.: "He is to assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth." Had Jesus fulfilled this prophecy, he would then have proved himself to be the Messiah, or person meant under that denomination, and would have drawn the whole Jewish nation after him. How it came to pass that he did not prove himself by doing so, is not my business to inquire; but that he did not, is very evident. The names of Israel and Judah cannot be usurped here; because the prophet having described his office with regard to the gentiles, he next describes it as regards the Jews; and that the prophet's true meaning might not be misapprehended, he farther describes them by the epithets of outcasts and dispersed. Surely Christians will not understand themselves as meant, under these distinguished circumstances; neither do I believe they will refer the accomplishment of his prophecy to their invented heavenly kingdom; for that would be doing the outcasts and dispersed too much honour, to assemble and gather them there; and they will hardly allow them that in heaven, of which they deprive them here on earth. Besides, they are not ignorant, that "A king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth: in his

days shall Judah be saved, and Israel dwell safely."* The contrary and reverse of all which happened in the days of Jesus: how then could he be that person?

Here then we have a very material difference between Moses and the promised Messiah: the one had no character or description to answer, the other had. But it is plain, that Jesus did not answer it; and in order to show that Jesus was not the prophet like Moses, let us make a short comparison. Moses was prepared by God with a sign, when the Israelites should demand it; but Jesus constantly refused any sign.† Moses did mighty wonders, and wrought such stupendous miracles, as convinced those who beheld them; these he did not do after the manner of jugglers, before chosen witnesses, or in corners, but in public, and in the presence of all the people, whom he assembled for that purpose; he performed them in the presence of his very opponents, who were sometimes made to feel the truth and effects of them. The magicians, who endeavoured to rival him, confessed that it was the hand of God. Thus acted Moses. But Jesus took quite a different method; those miracles which are related of him, were wrought in secret, performed before chosen witnesses, and on believers only, in corners, and by-places; the very persons who partook of the benefits were hindered from mentioning them, and were enjoined secrecy; his very brethren and relations disbelieved them.‡ The difference is manifest; for one convinced his enemies and rivals, the other could not even convince his brethren and nearest relations. The more Moses' opponents doubted or denied his commission or power, the greater and

* Jer. xxiii. 5.

† Matthew xii. 39.

‡ Ibid. xiii. 54.

more surprising were the proofs he gave them. But Jesus did the very reverse : “ For he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.”* Had he acted like Moses, he ought to have performed other great wonders ; for the greater their unbelief, the greater ought his miracles to have been, and the greater would the honour have been by their conviction ; so it was that Moses did and acted. It is not certain from what cause this unbelief arose ; it is not possible, however, that the greatness of his miracles should have occasioned it ; because these would naturally have had a contrary effect. Who knows but their unbelief might be owing to some discovery made in the method of his performing his miracles, at which they might take offence ; of which discovery “ He,” (Jesus being ignorant of the true cause,) “ marvelled, because of their unbelief ? ” This I only offer as a conjecture ; pray, consult the evangelists, to see if what they say concerning this affair will bear this sense. †

Let us continue the comparison : Moses was greatly honoured and esteemed by his brethren and countrymen ; but Jesus was quite the contrary ; for he declares himself, that no prophet is accepted in his own country. ‡ Moses delivered the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage : did Jesus deliver the Jews from the power and yoke of the Romans ? He indeed promised to “ gather them, as a hen did her brood.” § But this he never performed, nor even attempted ; though he knew this to be the chief part of the Messiah’s character, and the desire and hope of the

* Matthew xiii. 58.

† Luke iv. 24.

‡ Ibid. xiii. 58.

§ Ibid. xiii. 34.

nation : yet he pretends to excuse himself by saying, "they would not," when the contrary is really true.

Moses was forty days and forty nights with God on the mount; but of Jesus, it is declared that he was there as many days and nights with very different company, detained contrary to his will, famished, tossed, and led about by the devil, who must have been very superior in power to him,* or he could not so disrespectfully have used him. Moses governed the Israelites forty years : did Jesus do the like, or had he any command, post, or dignity ?

Moses solemnly prepared the people, and appointed a time for the whole body of the nation, to gather themselves in one place, to the end that they all might receive the law : did Jesus do the like ? Moses delivered to the Israelites a system of laws, moral, ritual, and political, by which they were to be governed, both in church and state : did Jesus do any thing like this ?

I know it is pretended that he introduced a new dispensation ; but this is so far from being clear, that the cause of his mission has always, is, and will for ever, be disputed. And I should be glad to be informed which of his laws, (I mean those which are practicable,) are new, and not commanded or known before : I have searched the evangelists, and do not find one. If this be the case, how can he be made to answer the description given of him, "of his giving laws like Moses, in the name of God himself?" If he did, which is the state or kingdom governed by them ? It is evident from the different, or rather opposite governments, in both, that he gave none ; and they so widely differ in

* Matthew iv. 1, 2.

that of the church, (which one would think, ought to be his peculiar care,) that the different denominations, or sects of Christians, do most uncharitably condemn each other, and what one party follows as right, the rest condemn as sinful. Surely this could never have happened, had he, like Moses, delivered laws for the government of both church and state. Moses published his laws in the most authentic manner; they were attested by God himself: were those of Jesus published or attested in like manner?

Moses took the people's express consent, who bound themselves, and posterity, to observe and obey: did Jesus do any thing like it? Moses, to convince the people that his laws were from God, enacted immediate rewards as a recompense, and blessing if they kept them; and on the contrary, immediate pains and penalties, if they neglected or forsook them. But Jesus refers them, both for rewards and punishments, to a state after their deaths. The nature of the first was convincing; the latter was not. In short, Moses proved himself to the satisfaction of all, that he was a person sent by God: Jesus did not. From these, and many other instances, I think that it is very evident and clear, that a more opposite character, to that of Moses, cannot be produced, either in their lives, or deaths. If even, therefore, we suppose, what is pretended, that a person was promised, who should be like Moses, and like him give laws: yet Jesus can never have been that person; for this passage cannot be consistently applied to him. On the other hand, it plainly and evidently appears from the context, that Moses promised a prophet to succeed him, or rather a succession of prophets; for he having therein forbidden the people the abominations of other nations, such

as divinations, observing times, practising enchantments, or the consulting of witches, familiar spirits, wizards, and necromancers,* he then promises to raise them a prophet, &c., to whom they should resort, apply, and have recourse to, on all proper exigencies, for the knowledge of some future events. This is the true scope and intention of this passage; and in this, its plain, obvious sense, it is understood by persons of the greatest learning and knowledge, both Christians and Jews. Father Calmet, very justly and judiciously asserts this to be the true meaning. I will transcribe what he says; "As to the Hebrews," says he, "who lived in the midst of these idolatrous people, accustomed to receive oracles, to have recourse to their diviners, magicians, and their interpreters of dreams: what temptation would they not have been under, to imitate these practices, these impieties, and superstitions, if God had not provided against it by affording them certain means of knowing some future events, in their most urgent necessities, by having recourse to the Lord, to his priests, and prophets? Thus, when Moses had forbidden the Israelites to consult magicians, witches, enchanters and necromancers, he promised to send them a prophet of their own nation, who should instruct them, and discover the truth to them. 'The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.'"[†] It is needless to produce more authorities; the passage best explains its own meaning.

But notwithstanding the clearness of this passage, the authors of the Universal History pretend that Joshua could

* Deut. xviii. 9-13.

† See Cal. Dict. on the word Oracle.

not be that prophet like Moses, whom God promised to raise, and commanded the people to obey under heavy penalties, because Joshua received directions from Moses to consult the Urim and Thummim, upon all emergencies;* and from thence they urge and say, "How could he, therefore, be the head prophet and director of such a numerous nation, who wanted a director himself? or how could the people be charged to hear, and obey him who was to receive his orders from the high priest."† To this objection I answer partly in their own words, from a remark of theirs: "That his (Joshua's) great character, drawn by Jesus the son of Sirach, mentions his succeeding that lawgiver, (meaning Moses,) in the prophetic spirit;" and concerning his book, they tell us, "That both Jews and the generality of Christians, have acknowledged it as his, and as a canonical book."‡ To this we may add what they also assert, "That Joshua was the only inspired writer of that age that we read of."§ Thus these historians are obliged to assert, not only his inspiration, but his being the head prophet; for they read of no other, notwithstanding their endeavours to depreciate his character, to serve a turn. In like manner they are obliged to make him the director and governor of "such a numerous nation," when they say, "Providence had by this time so far signalized him, that he became reputed by the whole Jewish nation."|| And they assert in another place that "After this Joshua governed the Israelitish commonwealth peaceably,"¶ and they do, throughout their history, give repeated instances of his being the

* Numb. xxvii. 21.

† Univ. Hist. Vol. iii. p. 436.

‡ Ibid. 483.

§ Ibid.

|| Ibid. 479.

¶ Ibid. 482.

governor, and also of the obedience being paid him. Thus do these historians contradict themselves. But whatever they may think or say, we have a superior evidence and guide;—to that then let us go;—I mean the Bible; from which it is plain, “That he was the man in whom was the spirit,”* as the text expresses it. It is also plain, that it was he whom the people were to obey.† It is plain likewise, that those who did not regard that which he commanded were severely punished.‡ This answered to what God promised: “That whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”§ Jesus therefore could not be here meant; because to him, there happened the very reverse; neither can Christians, consistently, claim this passage for Jesus, because there is in it a clause, declaring that “The prophet which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.”|| A provision this, which there could be no necessity for making, had the promise concerned Jesus; who, they, if consistent, must allow could never come under it. Be that as it will, it is plain that God spoke to Joshua immediately, without the intervention of any other person or thing, in like manner as he did to Moses.¶ Of this we have repeated instances; and God himself tells him, “As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake

* Numb. xxvii. 18.

† Ibid. 30.

‡ Compare the 17th and 18th verses of the 6th ch. of Joshua, with the 22d and sequel of the 7th ch.

§ Deut. xviii. 19.

|| Ibid. 20.

¶ Josh. i. 1; iv. 1-15; v. 2; vi. 2; vii. 10; viii. 1—&c.

thee.”* In consequence of this promise, “God magnified him in the sight of all Israel, that they might know, that as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee.”† And we accordingly find that the people “feared him, as they did Moses, all the days of his life.”‡ These instances are enough to show that Joshua succeeded Moses as a prophet, director, and governor; that God revealed, and spoke to him, immediately, in like manner as he did to Moses, in whose place he was appointed and substituted; that he was obeyed and feared, in like manner as Moses was, all the days of his life; and to think otherwise, or to imagine that Jesus is meant here is, in every respect, inconsistent and absurd, he being the most unlike the person promised, as is evident from all the circumstances of his life.

LETTER XVII.

I INTEND this letter shall contain an examination of another citation made in the Acts; and also a few quotations produced by St. Paul. In the method of applying them, we shall find the insufficiency of proving the things which are thereby intended: not one being made according to the primary sense and plain literal meaning.

XVII. When it was debated in the first council, whether the gentile converts should receive circumcision, and submit to the law of Moses, a passage is produced by St. James,

* Josh. i. 5.

† Ibid. iii. 7; iv. 14.

‡ Ibid.

by which the matter then in debate was decided; (for sayeth he) "To this agree the words of the prophet; as it is written,"

ACTS xv. 16.

"After this I will return and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up, that the residuc of men might seek the LORD, and all the gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the LORD who doeth all these things."

AMOS ix. 1.

"In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof, *and I will raise up his ruins*, and I will build it, as in the *days of old*, that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the heathen which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this."

You see how the text is adulterated, and that there is not the least connexion between the prophecy and the application; for it is obvious and plain, that the prophecy promises the re-establishment of the fallen kingdom, as in the days of old; the next verse declares the joy on that occasion, and the return of the captivity of Israel, with the building and inhabiting of the waste city, concluding with the following promise: "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled out of their land, which I* gave them, saith the LORD their God."† Whenever this is proved to have happened literally in the days of Jesus, it will then work the conviction of the Jews, which no application of text denoting very different manners has ever been able to do.

XVIII. It is just in the same manner that St. Paul endeavours to prove the call of the gentiles, when he says,

* En. Bib., "have given."

† Amos xi. last v.

“Even us whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the gentiles, as he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which are not my people, and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called, The children of the living God.”* Here he jumbles together two very different texts, and applies them as spoken of the gentiles, which plainly concern none but the Jews, as is evident from the texts to which please to turn, which are prophetic of very different times than those in which Jesus lived. The plain case is as follows: The prophet being ordered to take a wife of immoral habits, she bore him a son, who was called Jezreel, for reason there given; she then bore a daughter, who was called Lo-Ruchamah (i. e., not beloved); she next bore another son, who was called Lo-Ammi (i. e., not my people): in the very next verse the prophet himself makes application of these names, for, says he, “Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said to them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said to them, Ye are the sons of the living God.” “Then,” continues the prophet, “shall the children of Judah, and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land; for great shall be the day of Jezreel.”† Does all this concern any but the Jews, and their Restoration? can it be applied to any besides them? was any thing like this fulfilled in those times?

* Rom. ix. 24-26.

† Hosea i. throughout.

XIX. In the very same epistle St. Paul says, "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth these things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is to bring Christ down *from above*;) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is to bring up Christ from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach."* An excellent comment this, truly! who but St. Paul could find that Jesus was here intended by Moses to be brought down from above, and then again from below? or that the works recommended by Moses in the plainest manner, as being in every one's power to do and perform, meant the faith preached by St. Paul? Now compare St. Paul with Moses. The passage referred to is the following: "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off; it is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thine heart, that thou mayest do it."† If prophecies and passages of Scripture be thus applied, what wonder, that it should produce unbelief!

XX. St. Paul, in one of his epistles, says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made; he saith not, And to seeds, as of *many*; but as of one, And to thy

* Rom. x. 5-8.

† Deut. xxx. 11-14.

seed, which is Christ." By this and such like reasonings, one would think, St. Paul intended to convince by gross impositions; how great must the difficulties under which he laboured have been, when, in order to prove his point, he is forced to such shifts, and reduced to prove it by such unnatural interpretations. Who is there that is the least acquainted with the Hebrew language, but could tell St. Paul, and prove that the word in Hebrew is always used to signify many? Was the land of Canaan to be possessed by Christ alone, when the promise was made to Abraham in his seed? For if "thy seed" be Christ, as St. Paul pretends, then was none else to have a share in it? The false reasoning is too plain to be admitted, and confutes itself.

XXI. The same apostle in another place says, "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended, is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things."* Here you have reasoning in a most extraordinary manner. The place referred to is, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men."† The Psalmist says he received gifts, St. Paul says he gave gifts. But nothing can qualify the passage to his purpose; for the text speaks of Moses, when he ascended Mount Sinai to receive the law, as is plain and obvious from the context; and there is not the least hint that he descended first into the lower parts of the earth, as St. Paul has it.

* Eph. iv. 8-10.

† Psalm lxxviii. 18.

XXII. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, has the following passage, "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee?" And again, "I will be unto him a father, and he shall be to me a son"* The first part is plainly of David, and declares the pre-eminence which God gave him over the other kings of the earth, who had counselled against him, and his victory over them; † the other refers to a passage in Samuel: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son; if he commit iniquity, I will chastise him with the rod of men." ‡ This plainly and literally concerns Solomon, and accordingly excludes any other from being thereby meant. Could Jesus commit iniquity? or could he for his offence be chastised? this surely will never be allowed.

XXIII. In the same epistle St. Paul says, "And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." § This refers to a passage in the Psalms, wherein the Psalmist, setting forth the glory of God, says, "The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols; worship him all ye angels;" or, if you please, gods, as the word Elohim is translated in the English Bible. || The worship here recommended is to God; nothing in it concerns the worship of the Messiah, or first begotten, as St. Paul styles him, nor of his being brought into the world.

XXIV. St. Paul says in another epistle, "And hath

* Heb. i. 5.

† Psalm ii.

‡ 2 Sam. vii. 14.

§ Heb. i. 6.

|| Psalm xcvi. 7,

put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church.”* This superiority he pretends to prove from the following passage: “Thou madest him to have dominion over the work of thine hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”† But this is no prophecy; for the Psalmist here speaks of men, and the power given them over the brute creation, as is plain from the verse next following, mentioning: “All sheep, and oxen, yea the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea;” as also from the context; and therefore, it is not applicable to the dominion of Jesus. These instances are, I think, sufficient, and prove beyond contradiction that the application made by the apostles and evangelists, of prophecies and passages of Scripture, are not made according to their plain, obvious, literal meaning; their primary sense being of persons and things, which neither relate to Jesus, nor what passed in his time.

In some of my former letters (particularly my 8th, which please to peruse again) I have shown the insufficiency and absurdity of applying prophecies and passages in a different sense, for which reason I shall not now trouble you with repetitions; but conclude with applying to the evangelists and apostles, what a judicious person observed, viz.: “They argue from types, antitypes, parables, metaphors, allegories, allusions, inferences, patterns, resemblances, figures and shadows; and by such means can fetch every thing out of any thing.”‡ It is necessary to complete our inquiry (that nothing, though but seemingly material, escape our examination,) to attend to such other arguments

* Eph. i. 22.

† Psalm viii. 6.

‡ *Indep. Whig*, No. 48.

and proofs as are made use of, as an addition to the proofs and evidence contained in the New Testament. Indeed, one might be led to imagine that the evangelists and apostles being inspired (as is pretended,) must have known, if not of themselves, yet from the assistance, or rather guidance of the spirit, the prophecies and passages which contained proofs of what they advanced, and one might conclude that they, under the circumstance aforementioned, must have known, and taken in, and mentioned all the material passages which concerned their cause; to suppose that they did not, seems to me, to reflect on the foundations of Christianity, and to strike at their inspiration. It is in some sort accusing them of not making use of, the most proper, efficacious and convincing passages, and is nothing less than giving the preference to their own discoveries, as thinking them superior to those produced by the inspired writers. Whether this be really the case, or whether the evangelists' and apostles' reasonings and proofs be not by them deemed convincing, I shall not determine; but my next work shall be to examine some other prophecies, on which the greatest weight is laid, not taken notice of or applied by the writers of the New Testament, which are, notwithstanding, urged to evidence the messiahship of Jesus.

LETTER XVIII.

THE doctrine of the trinity is the most extraordinary invention ever attempted, and so contradictory to Scripture, reason, and sense, that no proposition, whatever impossibilities or contradictions it may consist of, can equal it. It is likely that this doctrine owed its first rise to the plurality of gods worshipped by the heathen, the more easily to gain them over to Christianity; and it was no hard matter so to apply some passages, and impose such a sense and meaning on phrases in the New Testament, as should confirm it,—more especially as those converts must have been entirely ignorant of the true import and meaning of the phrases there used. I was led to the consideration of this doctrine, on examining the application of such passages to Jesus, as are not mentioned by the writers of the New Testament. The authors of the Universal History quote two prophecies as having relation to the birth and divinity of Jesus. The first is that passage of Josiah, “Behold a virgin shall conceive,” &c., which, being already considered, I shall say nothing concerning. The other is, “Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace;”* all which titles and epithets are ascribed to Jesus, as being God and man,—urging that they are of such a nature, as not capable of being applied to mere

* Isaiah. ix. 6.

humanity; pretending, in consequence, that this was a character of a divine child, who was *wonderfully conceived, wonderfully born, and wonderfully manifested*.* His wonderful conception, I have heretofore considered, as also his wonderful birth. As to his wonderful manifestation, these historians make it to consist in that “the babe was wrapped up in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.”† They may believe it, if they please, on this or any other circumstances; it is not more extraordinary than their believing that the ancient Jews worshipped a trinity,‡ or that this person, or Jesus the Messiah, made frequent appearances before his incarnation; and they give us several instances of his conversing with mortals.§ But the most extravagant opinion, I think, is that of Mr. Whiston, quoted in the *Universal History*, which declares, “That it was the same person, that is, Jesus the Messiah, who gave the Law on Mount Sinai, and who took the title of the God of Israel, and was adored by the children of Israel.”|| But leaving these ridiculous opinions, some are confirmed in the notion of the trinity from the word *Elohim* being plural; and to the same purpose do they allege that passage, “let us make man in our image,”¶ which they pretend was a consultation of the trinity. I have put all these passages together, tending, as is pretended, to prove the divinity of Jesus, and the doctrine of the trinity; the which I shall consider. As to that passage of *Isaiah*,** it plainly concerns the person and character of king Hezekiah, who was born about the time in which he delivered that prophecy, The word

* *Univ. Hist.* Vol. x. p. 459.

† *Ibid.*

‡ *Ibid.* Vol. iii. p. 10.

§ *Ibid.* pp. 261, 288, 355, 486.

|| *Ibid.* Vol. i. p. 91.

¶ *Gen.* i. 26.

** *Isaiah* ix. 6.

El, translated God, I shall prove to be an appellation given to a great or a mighty hero, and ought to be rendered in this place as in Moses' song, where *Elé Moab*, is rendered "the mighty men of Moab."* *Abi Ad*, rendered "everlasting father," is, rightly translated, *Pater Seculi*, "father of the age," by Arias Montanus, not "everlasting father;" for this *even* Jesus never pretended to be. Indeed there is the highest probability to think that no other than Hezekiah was meant; for on him a wonderful cure was wrought, and for him the sun's shadow went back ten degrees. For the character of this prince, I refer you to his history.† I cannot, however, forbear quoting a passage from an ingenious author: "Justin Martyr, (says he,) cites the following passage of the same prophet, 'Unto us a child is born, and a young man given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder;' which he (Justin Martyr) says is a prophetic description of the power of the cross, to which Jesus applied his shoulder at his crucifixion; though the passage as it stands in Isaiah relates in its obvious and primary sense to Hezekiah, and that part of it, whereon Justin Martyr lays stress, most manifestly relates to the bearing the office of a civil magistrate, and not to carrying the cross."‡ As to the word *Elohim*, it is well-known to such as are acquainted with the Hebrew language, that it bears very different senses in Scripture; and is accordingly made use of to denote very different things. For instance, "And the LORD said to Moses, See I have made thee a god (*Elohim*) unto Pharaoh."§ Here it means a superior. "And Manoah said

* Exodus xv. 15.

† 2 Kings xviii. to xxi., and 2 Chron. xxix. to xxxiii.

‡ Grounds and Reasons, p. 259.

§ Exodus vii. 1.

unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen god (Elohim).”* Here it signifies an angel, which Manoah in the preceding verse is declared to have seen. “Then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges (Elohim).”† Here it is made use of for the magistrate. Here, then, to produce no more examples, you have the same word used to denote different things: would it not be absurd to suppose in these applications of the word, that, because it is plural, it therefore signifies a plurality of persons in each case? that Moses, by having the word applied to him, was a *triune* person? that when applied to the angel it meant not one, but three? or that a judge signified a trinity? Now, if it be absurd to put such a construction on the word Elohim, when used to denote these three persons, or offices, how much more must it be to put the like construction on the word when applied to God, who is also named in the singular; for instance, “Then he forsook God (Eloah);”‡ “Now consider this ye that forget God (Eloah).”§ Besides, if Elohim implies more than one, why not more than three?

It is equally absurd to pretend that, because the Scripture says, “Let us make man,” that the consultation was made with the other persons in the Trinity; for either the other persons knew it, or were ignorant of it; if the first, then was the consultation needless; if the latter, then were both the other persons deficient in knowledge, and consequently could neither be gods, nor of the same essence with God; to this dilemma must they be reduced, who interpret

* Judges xiii. 22.

† Deut. xxii. 28.

‡ Exodus xxii. 28.

§ Psalm l. 22.

this verse as referring to a trinity. Besides, the Scripture presently says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him,"* all which is in the singular. The whole passage very plainly indicates that God, being about to make an extraordinary creation, condescended to consult the angels, to whom he thought proper to impart beforehand so important an event. Besides which, this mode of speaking in the plural for the singular is common and agreeable to the majesty of the Hebrew language. Thus one of Job's companions tells him, "How long will it be ere you make an end of words? mark and afterwards we will speak."† Daniel, when he was speaking to the king, says, "And we will tell the interpretation."‡ Thus it is also said, "The sons of Dan, Hushim," which, however, was only one;§ and again, "The sons of Pallu, Eliab."|| But these things are so plain, and so well-known to you, that I shall trouble you no farther; tho' I cannot forbear inserting a passage from one, who will not be accused of favouring the Jews. The person I mean is Father Calmet, who thus delivers his sentiments on the word: "Elohi, or Eloï, Elohim, one of the names of God, Angels, Princes, Great Men, Judges; and even false gods are sometimes called by this name; the sequel of the discourse is what assists us in judging rightly concerning the true meaning of this word. It is the same as Eloah, one is the singular, the other is the plural; nevertheless, Elohim is often

* Gen. i. 27.

† Job. xviii. 23, this I think not conclusive, as there were probably more than one present.

‡ Ch. ii. 36.

§ Gen. xlvi. 23.

|| Num. xxvi. 8.

construed in the singular number."* According to which rule, whenever this name is applied to men, it cannot imply any divinity in them; therefore, the word El Gibbor cannot mean mighty God, as it is rendered (in the ninth chapter of Isaiah) in the English version, but means, as it does in other places, a great or mighty person, or hero.

Thus have I examined the passage from which they pretend to prove the divinity of Jesus, or the trinity. I shall in my next show how repugnant such doctrine is, not only to the Old Testament, but also prove from the new, that Jesus had no such pretensions, and how contradictory such doctrine is to many passages therein contained, and conclude the whole from some of the most learned and eminent men.

LETTER XIX.

PROTESTANTS very justly reject the doctrine of transubstantiation; because it is manifestly contradictory to reason and sense; for as the eye cannot forbear seeing that the object continues the same, notwithstanding any form of words, so the understanding cannot forbear either assenting or dissenting, according to the agreement or disagreement of ideas,—we having as sure a guide in the conduct of our understanding, as we can possibly have in that of our senses. Was any person to assure me that one is three, and that three are but one, or that one simple unit was three simple units,

* Calmet on the word Elohim.

and three simple units were but one simple unit : I should take such a person to be either mad, or of having some intentions to impose on me in the grossest manner. And were such a person to tell me that he had a positive command from God to teach me any such propositions, I should certainly call his integrity in question ; for my understanding would immediately give him the lie ; for as God had not given me faculties to comprehend the proposition, how could He expect my assent ? And, in justice, He could not command me to believe that which He had not enabled me to comprehend. On the contrary, God has laid down such propositions as are diametrically opposite to the doctrine of the trinity. To instance in a few :—“ Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD ;” or rather, “ the LORD is one.”* “ That the LORD, he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath ; there is none else.”† “ Unto thee was it shown, that thou mightest know, that the LORD he is god, there is none else besides him.”‡ “ See now that I, even I, am He : and there is no god with me ; I kill, and I make alive, I wound, and I heal ; neither is there *any* that can deliver out of my hand.”§ Let the Arians, or trinitarians, reconcile the trinity, or deified persons, to these texts, or to the following passages :—“ And thou shalt know no other god but me, for there is no saviour besides me.”|| “ Have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it ? ye are even my witness. Is there a god beside me ? Yea, there is no god ; I know not any.”¶ “ I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no god besides me.”** “ Look unto me and be ye saved, all

* Deut. vi. 4.

† Ibid. iv. 39.

‡ Deut. iv. 35.

§ Ibid. xxxii. 39.

|| Hosea xii. 4.

¶ Isa. xlv. 8.

** Ibid. xlv. 5.

the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."* "To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?"† "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me."‡ In short, if there is no other "god but He;" "if there is none with Him, (or, if you please, in his essence); if there is none besides Him;" "if there is none like Him;" "if He has no equal, nor any god able to save besides Him," and if God declares that he "knows not any other god:" how vain and impious is it to worship any other, or to pretend to put any such meaning on any part of Scripture!

In the New Testament there are many passages which directly contradict the divinity of Jesus. To instance a few: we are told that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man"§ which is declaring him to be merely human; for what greater absurdity, than to say that God increases in wisdom, or that he was grown in favour with himself? Jesus declares, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me;"|| by which he declares himself to be only an agent, to do the will of his superior, and consequently could not be the same as he that had the power of sending; as he that sends, or commands another to go, cannot be the same as he who goes and is commanded by a superior; for to command and to obey are different acts, inconsistent in the same person, unless a person, can be said, not only to command himself, but *also* to obey himself, which is absurd. Of the like passages we

* Isa. xlv 22.

† Ibid. xlv. 5.

‡ Ibid. 9.

§ Luke. ii. 52.

|| John vii. 16.

have many. Again, Jesus declares of himself, "I go unto the Father; for my Father is greater than I."* Consequently, he that has a superior cannot be God. In another place he has the following passage: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was,"† Here he invokes his superior for that which he not only had not, but could not obtain of himself. For either he had that glory, or he had it not: if he had it, it was absurd to pray for what he had; and if he had it not, then could he not be God; for he that had the power to grant it, and to whom he prayed, must have been his superior. Besides he prays for a thing which he had "before the world was," of which (to make the passage sense) he must have been divested; but how absurd it is to suppose that the Deity divests himself, or is divested by another of his glory or any of his attributes! Another remarkable expression of his is that concerning his knowledge of the day of judgment, declaring, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the son, but the Father,"‡ by which he excludes himself of having that knowledge, confessing his ignorance, as it is declared to be known only to the Father

Now how can he be God, or of the same essence with the Father, and yet be ignorant of what the Father knew? Or can that person be God who is deficient in knowledge in not knowing that which another knows? These passages are sufficient, and unanswerable, and clearly prove that Jesus pretended not to any divinity; and so far was he from taking any of the divine

* John xiv. 28.

† Ibid. xvii. 5.

‡ Matt. xiii. 32.

attributes to himself, that he rebukes one for only calling him "Good master," and tells him "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."* I think a more express declaration cannot be had, and so persuaded was he of this, and that worship was only due to God, that he tells the devil, (who it seems would persuade him to the contrary,) "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and him only shalt thou serve;"† a saying that ought to be strictly followed.

One of the phrases which I make no doubt, might have been misapplied by those who propagated the doctrine of the trinity, either through policy, design, or ignorance, is that of "Son of God," so often used in the New Testament; but it appears very plain that this phrase means not either a divine person, or one co-equal with God, but was synonymous with Messiah: either or both being used indifferently to signify the same thing. This is evident from the use of these terms throughout the New Testament. To prove this I will make use of the words of Mr. Locke, who in his Reasonableness of Christianity,‡ cites the following passage (John, i. 41): Andrew says to Simon, "We have found the Messiah;" and Philip, on the same occasion, (45) says to Nathaniel, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathaniel who disbelieved this, upon Christ's speaking to him was convinced of it, when he declares his assent in these words, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel;" from which it is evident, that to believe him to be "Him

* Matt. xix. 17.

† Ibid. iv. 10.

‡ p. 519.

of whom the law and the Prophets did write," or to be "Son of God," or to be "King of Israel," was in effect the same as to be the Messiah. "When the priests and Levites sent to John the Baptist to ask who he was," (John, i. 19) he, understanding their meaning, answered, "I am not the Messiah;" but he bears witness that Jesus is the "Son of God," that is the Messiah. (See p. 520.) This also was the declaration of him at his baptism, by a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased," (Mat. iii. 17,) which was a declaration of him, of his being the Messiah. (See p. 521.) He asks his disciples, "Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist; but others say Elias, and others, one of the prophets," (so that it is evident that those who believed him an extraordinary person knew not yet who he was, though it was the third year of his ministry, and not a year before his death;) and he says unto them, "But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answered and said unto him, Thou art the Messiah." Luke iv. 41, "And devils also came out of many, crying out and saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak; for they knew that he was Christ." Mar. iii. 11, 12. "Unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, thou art the Son of God. And he straitly charged them, that they should not make him known." Here again we may observe, from the comparing of the two texts, that "thou art the Son of God," or "thou art the Messiah," were indifferently used for the same thing. And again, "Where confessing Jesus to be the Son of God," is the same as "confessing him to be the Messiah," those two expressions being understood, amongst

the Jews, to signify the same thing. (p. 531.) He inquired of his disciples (Mark, viii. 27, whom the people took him for; and they telling him, for John the Baptist, or one of the old prophets risen from the dead, he asked, what they themselves thought, and here again Peter answers in these words, (Mark viii. 29,) "Thou art the Messiah." (Luke ix. 20,) "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God," which expressions we may hence gather, mean the same thing. (See p. 533.) "How calling him the son of God, came to signify that he was the Messiah, would not be hard to show; but it is enough that it appears plainly, that it was so used, and had that import among the Jews at that time, which, if any one desires to have further evidence to him, he may add Matt. xxvi. 63; John vi. 69, xi. 27, 30, 31, and those places occasionally take notice of." (See p. 531.) In his first vindication he quotes the words of Doctor Patrick, Bishop of Ely, viz: "To be the Son of God, and to be Christ, being but different expressions of the same thing." And again, from the same prelate, "It is the very thing to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and to believe that Jesus is the Son of God; express it how you please." (See p. 598.) These passages, and many others to the same purpose, he defends and confirms in his vindication; but what I have here collected is sufficient to my purpose, which is to show the signification of the phrase, Son of God, and in what sense this phrase was used in the New Testament. The following remarks will set this in a clear light.

We have a passage in the gospel of a question proposed by Jesus to the scribes and pharisees, namely, "Whose son they thought the Messiah was to be?" To this they answered, "The son of David." He saith unto them, "How

doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?" To which he added, "If David then did call him Lord, how is he his son?"* "And no man was able to answer him." The authors of the Universal History remark on this passage, that "it doth not indeed appear that they had any notion of his divine nature, and therefore might be easily puzzled to answer this question,"† which plainly shows, that the calling him Son of God, could not be owing to any notion of his divinity. For had they understood his pretensions, they might have easily answered, that David could not have intended to call the Messiah Lord, or thought him God; for if he had, he would not have made him stand in need of another's assistance to make his enemies his footstool; because it must be inconsistent and absurd; for he that stands in need of another's help could neither be Lord, nor of the same essence with God; and thus might Jesus have been nonplussed.

The passage refers to Psalm cx., which though at the top is put a Psalm of David, is still not of his composing, any more than the twentieth and twenty-first Psalms are, which bear the same title. This is evident from the contents of those and this Psalm, which, like many more, were composed by others, such as Ethan, Yeduthun, the sons of Korah, and Assaph, &c. This Psalm, in particular, seems to me to be dedicated to David, on his escape from the imminent danger his life was in, in the encounter with the giant Ishbi-benob, which caused his men to swear, that he should not go out to battle any more,‡ but that he should

* Matt. xxii. 42, and sequel

† Univ. Hist. Vol. x. p. 586.

‡ 2 Sam. xxi. 16, 17.

abide in Jerusalem whilst the Lord chastised his enemies, and he ruled like Melchizedeck, or a just king, (which that word signifies); the word *cohen*, rendered priest, signifies also *chief ruler*, and is rightly so translated in another place,* where it says, "and David's sons were (*cohanim*) chief rulers," not chief priests; and in like manner it ought to be translated here, in this Psalm, which represents David as chief ruler, and acting like a just king in Zion, whilst, without danger of his life, the Lord should make his enemies his footstool. This is the intent and scope of the Psalm, as is evident from every part of it; and the title *Lord*, therein given David, imports no divinity, no more than it does in many other places. This Psalm cannot be applied to Jesus, nor can it be made to correspond to him; for it is evident that to him there happened the very reverse. And if Jesus's authority avails any thing, from it might be proved, that when such titles are given to men they imply no divinity; for when he was in danger of being stoned, because, that being a man, they apprehended from his discourse that he made himself a god, Jesus answered in his own excuse, "Is it not written in your law, I said ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, why should you think me a blasphemer that am sent of God, for declaring myself the Son of God?"† By which expression it is evident he pretends to no divinity, no more than those who were called gods did.

2 Sam. viii. 18.

† John x. 34, &c.

LETTER XX.

THE doctrine of the Trinity being once introduced, and made a fundamental article of Christianity, all persons pretend to support their different opinions concerning it, and all appeal to the witnesses of the New Testament to prove that, which they themselves declare to be incomprehensible and unintelligible.

The very terms contradicting one another, and showing the folly of pretending to explain that which none can either understand or comprehend, soon occasioned such divisions amongst Christians, as are not to be paralleled in history; each party damning, excommunicating, banishing, imprisoning, fining, and even murdering the other, in such a manner, that I have often wondered that people who are so ready to apply God's judgment on other occasions, should not bethink themselves that these troubles came on the Church, as a judgment for their manifold absurdities and impieties.

The creed which establishes this doctrine, is so full of contradictions and inconsistencies, that I challenge any person to compose, within the same compass of words, anything equal to it, or more repugnant to reason and common sense. For the truth of this, I shall refer you to the Athanasian Creed, which is crammed down the throats of believers, "as necessary to salvation," inflicting on unbelievers the cruelest punishments, even that of "perishing everlasting," concluding by saying: "This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe he cannot be saved." But as

it is impossible for any intelligent, reasonable man to believe the doctrine of the Trinity, those who pretend to it, assert such things as are almost incredible. The pious Bishop Beveridge (as he is commonly called) is an instance of this. Concerning this article of the Trinity he has the following passage: "This, I confess, is a mystery which I cannot possibly conceive; yet it is a truth which I can easily believe; yea, therefore it is so true, that I can easily believe it; because it is so high that I cannot possibly conceive it; for it is impossible anything should be true of the Infinite Creator, which can be easily expressed to the capacities of a finite creature; and for this reason I ever did, and ever shall look upon those apprehensions of God to be the truest, whereby we apprehend Him to be the most incomprehensible, and that to be the most true of God which seems the most impossible unto us."* Who after this can believe the Trinity, since it gives us notions of God so contradictory in themselves, and so inconsistent to his attributes? But this is not all; for the Bishop continues: "Upon this ground, therefore, it is that the mysteries of the Gospel, which I am less able to conceive, I think myself the more obliged to believe, especially this mystery of mysteries, the Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity, which I am so far from being able to comprehend, or indeed to apprehend, that I cannot seriously set myself to think of it, or to sum up my thoughts a little concerning it, but I immediately lose myself in a trance or ecstasy. That God the Father should be one perfect God of himself; God the Son, one perfect God of himself; and God the Holy Ghost one perfect God

* Thoughts on Religion, Article 3.

of himself; and yet these three, should be but one perfect God of himself; so that one should be perfectly three, and three perfectly one; that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, should be three, and yet but one—but one, and yet three! O heart-amazing thought, devouring, inconceivable mystery! who cannot believe it to be true of the glorious Deity? Certainly none but such as are able to apprehend it; which I am sure I cannot, and I believe no other creature can; and because no creature can possibly conceive how it should be so, therefore I believe it to be so." I am tired of transcribing this nonsense, which is really what Christians must believe,—a faith, or cause of faith, however, that I shall never be able to attain; neither do I believe the Bishop himself ever did, if he was a rational, reasonable creature. Thus you see to what absurdities, inconsistencies, and incredibilities, those are led to believe, who contrary to Scripture, to reason, and to common sense, set up the Trinity.

I know of but one passage in the whole New Testament which can lead to this doctrine, and that is: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;"* which passage I will, on another occasion, take into consideration, and prove, from many circumstances, its spuriousness, inserted long after Matthew's time, when the doctrine of the Trinity took place, and baptism had been instituted as a sacrament, in order to authorize both the one and the other. There is, however, one method made use of to baffle all inquiries concerning this, and other articles of the

* Matthew xx. 19.

Christian faith, which is, to make them mysteries; everything which is contrary to reason and common sense (as everything peculiar to Christianity is) is a mystery. They have but little regard to what St Peter advises them to "Be always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you."* They choose rather to answer the character which Paul the Apostle gives of some in his days, namely: "Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor wherefore they affirm."† To such we may say in St. Paul's words, "So likewise you, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken?"‡ "Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian; and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me."§ All which is a very just way of reasoning; for if the meaning of the voice may be known and explained, then it ceases to be mysterious; but if they utter with their tongues things not understood: or if they form propositions contradictory in themselves, "How shall it be known what is spoken," or how shall people believe if they "Know not the meaning of the voice?" Must not such doctrine be rejected on St. Paul's principles? But alas! they not only subscribe to these doctrines, but swear to the belief of them; and are therefore under an obligation to support them,—an unhappiness this, greatly to be lamented, as a hindrance to truth and sincerity.

Mahomed, whatever he might have been in other respects, merits the highest praises for his just and true notion of

* 1 Pet. iii. 15. † 1 Tim. i. 7. ‡ 1 Cor. xiv. 9. § 1 Cor. xiv. 11.

God, and for inculcating the same to his followers. The ingenious Mr. Sale does him justice by declaring: "That both Mahomed, and those among his followers who were reckoned orthodox, had and continue to have just notions of God and his attributes, (always excepting their obstinate and impious rejecting of the Trinity.)* Now, how a person can be called impious, who has just notions of God and his attributes, merely because he does not admit of a Trinity, is what I cannot comprehend. But if Christians think them obstinate, they are, however, consistent in rejecting this doctrine; for Mahomed declares, "Whoever shall give a companion unto God, God shall exclude him from paradise, and his habitation shall be hell-fire. They are certainly infidels, who say God is the third of three; for there is no God besides one God."† In another chapter he says, "Say not there are three gods; forbear this, it will be better for you God is but one God."‡ And why may they not urge that those, who admit a generation in the deity, reason inconsistently? for if it only produce the same God, then it is useless; and if another, unnecessary; an argument not to be answered by either Arians or Trinitarians. I shall conclude this article with the opinions of the greatest geniuses of our age. The first is Mr. Wollaston, who says, "He who exists of himself, depends in no regard upon another, and (as being a Supreme Cause) in the foundation of existence to other beings, must exist in the uppermost and best means of existing; and not only so, but (since He is infinite and illimited,) He must exist in the best manner,

* See his Prelim. Disc. Sec. iv. p. 71.

† Alcoran, chap. v.

‡ Ibid. chap. iv.

illimitedly and infinitely; now, to exist thus, is infinite goodness of existence; and to exist in a manner infinitely good, is to be perfect. There can be but one such being, that is, as it appears by Prop. 3d, that there must be at least one independent being, such as is mentioned in Prop. 1st, so now that, in reality, there is but one; because his manner of existence being perfect and illimited. That manner of being, (if I may speak so) is exhausted by Him, or belongs solely to Him; if any other could partake with Him in it, He must want what that other had, be deficient and limited; infinite and illimited inclose all. If there could be two beings, each by himself absolutely perfect, they must be either of the same, or different natures; of the same it cannot be; because, thus both being infinite, their existence would be coincident; that is, they would be but the same one. Nor can they be of different natures; because if their natures were opposite, or contrary, one to the other, being equal, (infinite both, and everywhere meeting the one with the other,) the one would just destroy, or be the negation of the other."

The following is a translation of part of Mr. Locke's Letter to Mr. Limborch, dated 2d April, 1698. (See his Works.) "The question you propose is reduced to this, 'How the unity of God may be proved,' or in other terms, 'How it can be proved that there is but one God?' To resolve this question, it is necessary to know, before we come to prove the unity of God, what we understand by the word God. The ordinary idea, and I believe the true idea we have of God, and of such who know his existence, is that he is an infinite Being, eternal, incorporeal, and all-perfect. Then, from this known idea, it seems to me easy

to deduce the unity of God. In effect, a being all-perfect, or otherwise perfectly perfect, cannot be but solely; because a being all-perfect cannot want any of its attributes, perfections, or degrees of perfection, which imports him more to possess than to be deprived of; for otherwise he would want as much as would make him entirely perfect. For example: to have power is a much greater perfection than to have none; to have still greater power, is a greater perfection than to have less; and to have all power, which is to be almighty, is a greater perfection than to want any part of it. This proved, two beings, almighty, are incompatible; because we should be obliged to suppose, that one would necessarily will that which the other would, and, in that case, one of the two, in which the will is, must necessarily determine the will of the other, who could not be free, and would, consequently, want that perfection, which we have treated of. For it is better to be free, than to be submissive to the determination and will of another. And if they are not reduced to the necessity of willing always one and the same thing: in such case, the one might act that which the other would not; and then the will of the one would prevail over the will of the other, and he of the two, whose power could not second his will, cannot be almighty; for he cannot do as much as the other. Of course, then, there are not two almighty beings, nor can there be two almighty beings; consequently there cannot be two gods. By the same idea of perfection we attain to the knowledge of God being omniscient; so that the supposition of two distinct beings which have a power, and one distinct will, is an imperfection that one cannot screen his thoughts from the other, but if one can sever his thoughts from the other,

then cannot the other be omniscient; for not only does he not know that which may be known; but, likewise, does not know what the other knows. The same may be said of God's omnipresence. It is better he should be in the vast extent of infinite space, than to be excluded from the smallest part of space; for if he is excluded from any part of space, he cannot operate, nor know what is done in that space, and consequently, can neither be almighty nor omniscient. If against this reasoning it should be said that the two gods which they suppose, (or the two hundred thousand, for by the same reasoning that there may be two, there may be two million, for there is no method of limiting the number, I say if they suppose, that several gods have one perfect almighty, that is exactly the same power; and have also the same knowledge, the same will, and that they equally exist in the same place; it is only multiplying the same being. But in the end, they do but reduce one supposed plurality to one true unity. For to suppose two intelligent beings, who know, will, and do incessantly the same thing, and have not a separate existence, is nothing more than to suppose, in words, one plurality, and to admit, effectually, one simple unity. For the being inseparably united by the will, by the understanding, by the action, and by the place, is as great an union as one intelligent being can possibly be united to himself; and, consequently, the supposing that where there is such an union, there can be two beings, is to suppose a division where there can be none, or a thing divided with itself." There requires no addition to the plain, clear, and convincing reasoning of the foregoing learned persons. I shall only apply to the subject of these letters, the words of the excellent Archbishop

Tillotson, when he tells us, “That if all the great mathematicians, of all ages, Archimedes, and Euclid, and Apollonius, and Diophantus, &c., could be supposed to meet in a general council, and should there declare in a most solemn manner, and give it under their hands and seals, that twice two did not make four, but five, that this would not in the least move him to be of their mind ;”* and of this opinion must all reasonable people be, by what names or epithets they may be called. I am, &c.

LETTER XXI.

JACOB’S blessing to Judah is famous both among the Jewish and Christian commentators ; the latter pretend, that it is a plain prophecy of Jesus, and consequently take great pains to show its literal accomplishment in him. But to be convinced that it is neither plainly nor literally fulfilled in Jesus, one need but observe, not only the variety, but the contrariety of opinions which their commentators have run into. The terms which the Patriarch has made use of are such as increase the difficulty and divisions,—every one explaining and deriving the sense and meaning of the words *shebet*, *mechokek*, *ad*, and *Shiloh*, and fixing their import as best suits their different purpose. This you will find to be the real state of the case on consulting a few out of the many different authors, who have commented on, or ex-

* Six Sermons p. 13.

plained this famous passage, which is rendered in our English Bible, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. xlix. 10.) I do not suppose you expect I should enter into a critical examination, much less a confutation of the many different and contradictory opinions. This would be needless, since there is not one interpretation and application that ever was made, but what has been objected to and confuted by some author or other, amongst themselves, so that you will find this task amply and fully done to your hands.

There is, however, of late, a new interpretation and application, started by the authors of the Universal History, who, I suppose, dissatisfied with interpretations hitherto made, have opened a new and different plan from all other commentators. A few observations are therefore necessary on their hypothesis. They pretend "that the Jews did not lose their sceptre, Sanhedrin, or highest court of judicature, and supreme legislative power, till the heathen became converts to Christianity, of whom Cornelius was the first, that event denoting the gathering of the people, as foretold by the Patriarch." (Vol. x. p. 317.)

In consequence of this opinion, they (contrary to all other commentators) place the accomplishment of this prophecy in the Sanhedrin's retaining, until that event, the supreme legislative power, and conformably thereto they represent Jesus' trial before Pilate in a suitable light:—"In order (say they) to set those right who, from the notion of the whole power of life and death being taken away before this time, have inferred that the sceptre spoken of by

Jacob was departed from Judah.”* It was hitherto a matter of difference amongst commentators, where to fix the sceptre’s departure from Judah, which was generally placed in the supreme power of the Sanhedrin; but its departure, by the Sanhedrin’s loss of that power, was what they all agreed in, (indeed the only thing they did agree in,) and this was a circumstance deemed necessary to make out the accomplishment of this prophecy. A few quotations from some authors of note will set this in a clear light. One author declares, “That the Sanhedrin had lost the power of life and death; and when they were crucifying the Messiah, they acknowledged that the sceptre was departed from Judah; since the Jews said to Pilate, ‘It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.’† This is the first period (says this author) of the accomplishment of the oracle.”‡ Another asserts, “That the Romans, who were masters of the country, had taken from them the power of life and death; they might pronounce a man guilty, but not condemn him in form, nor order his execution; they (for this reason) carried him before Pilate, the Governor of the Province.”§ Another, speaking of Herod, says, “This was the first foreigner to whom the Jews became immediately subject, so that the ancient prophecy of the sceptre’s departing from Judah, is, by the best critics, supposed to begin to take place at this time.”|| Another learned author declares, that “Cyrenius having reduced Judea into the form of a Roman province, and instead of their former governor of their own nation, placed a Roman Procurator over them, then began the fulfil-

* Un. His. Vol. x. p. 594. † John xviii. 3. ‡ Basnage Book iv. 21.

‡ Calmet’s Dict. on the word Jesus. || Ech. Ecc. His., Intro. p. 16.

ling of this prophecy. For then, that is, at the time of this reduction of Judea to a Roman province, the sceptre and the lawgiver from between their feet began to be taken away.* But then (says the same author) when Coponius was made Governor of Judea, the power of life and death being taken away from them and placed in a foreign governor, and justice being thenceforth administered by the laws of Rome instead of their own nation, then truly began the sceptre to depart from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet."† Thus you see how unanimous they all are in placing the departure of the supreme power, in which they make the sceptre to consist, before the coming of Jesus, contrary to the authors of the Universal History.

These different opinions prove what I intimated in a former letter (X), of their making two-edged tools of the prophecies, to cut which way they please, or as it best suits or serves their turn. For if the sceptre, which they place in the supreme legislative power, departed, or was before that time taken away from the Sanhedrin, as is generally asserted, (no matter when,) why,—then they do, from that remarkable circumstance, pretend to prove, that the prophecy was literally fulfilled at that time. But if on the contrary, the sceptre, or supreme legislative power, did still subsist, or was possessed by the Sanhedrin, why,—then they do, from that contrary or opposite circumstance, also pretend to prove the accomplishment of the same prophecy,—literally too, to be sure, so that nothing, however inconsistent or contradictory in itself, stands in their way. The literal application of this prophecy and its accomplishment in Jesus, is

* Prid. Connec. Vol. iv. p. 932.

† Ibid. p. 953.

therefore far from being as clear and evident as they pretend; and for the truth of this, I appeal to Dr. Sherlock, who says, that “there are so many interpretations of this prophecy, some peculiar to the Jews, and some to Christians, and so *many difficulties to be accounted for, whatever way we take.*”^{*} And again he declares, “That there is no prophecy in the Old Testament, that has undergone so many interpretations and critical disquisitions as this now before us. It would make a volume (says he) to report exactly the various sentiments of learned men upon this subject.”[†] You see now, how much learned men differ, notwithstanding they pretend it to be so clear, that “The oracle doth not now admit of any difficulty;”[‡] all which, unless you take their word, will appear in fact to be the very reverse; for though they have been canvassing, commenting, and illustrating this passage, and that by the ablest pens and most acute wits: yet such irreconcilable differences still subsist, both in explaining and applying, as also in the chief circumstances of its accomplishment, to make it dark and intricate now, as applied to Jesus, as ever it was. For if it be a plain prophecy of Jesus, why such contradictions and variety of opinions concerning its accomplishments?§

Let us now examine, whether the supreme legislative power, (in which the sceptre promised to Judah, is made to consist,) was held by the Sanhedrin; but *on examination* it appears very plain that it was departed, or taken away from it, long before that period, and its authority, reduced

* Intent and Use of Proph. Dis. vi. p. 146.

† Ibid. iii. p. 254.

‡ Basnage, B. iv. ch. 21.

§ Thus far these letters were published before they appeared in The Occident.

to a mere nothing, a *very* shadow of authority,* was made dependent on the Roman governors; consequently those governors, and not the Sanhedrin, had the supreme power. This is easily shown from those very historians, though they assert, and pretend to make out the very reverse, to serve a turn. They tell us themselves, that from a change which Gabinus made in the government (long before the birth of Jesus) the Jews “fell under the subjection of a set of domineering lords,” and consequently lost their power† by the change; and, though Hyrcanus had afterwards a grant of the government, both as Prince and High Priest, with privilege of judging all causes,‡ it is evident that whatever power wherewith he invested the Sanhedrin, it must have been very precarious, far short of the supreme legislative power. This appears from their suffering Herod to appear before them, “though summoned as a criminal, in such guise as gave them to understand that he came not as a private person to be judged by them.” And how could they possess the supreme power, without either the freedom of judging or enforcing their sentence? That they had not that privilege, is very plain from the letters which Sextus Cæsar wrote to intimidate the Sanhedrin, and that in their judicial capacity.§ Can it be said they were the supreme legislators, and yet have their jurisdiction disclaimed by Herod,|| who cruelly put to death all the members excepting two, and that too, for their proceeding in that very council? How insignificant must their power have been if they could not hinder the abolition of their ceremonies, and the intro-

* Prid. Connexions, Vol. iv. p. 933.

† Univ. Hist. Vol. x. p. 376.

‡ Jos. Ant. lib. xiv. ch. 17.

§ Univ. Hist. Vol. x. 385.

|| Ibid. p. 386.

ducing of foreign customs, contrary to law :* neither could they hinder a law of Herod's being imposed on them, not only contrary to the laws of Moses, but also contrary to the inclination of the whole nation. If these be not proofs, that they had lost the supreme legislative power, and that it was never restored to the Sanhedrin, I know not what can be deemed so. †

Besides if they had not lost that power, would they have dared to tell Pilate such a notorious falsehood, as that "it was not lawful for them to put any man to death," who certainly must have known the contrary? As for the motives which they allege, pretending that the Sanhedrin acted in the manner "they did, 1st, To throw the odium of his death as much as possible upon Pilate and the Romans; and 2d, To make him undergo a more severe and ignominious punishment," ‡ it will be sufficient to observe, that if it be true, as they pretend, that the Sanhedrin had at that time the supreme legislative power, they could have nothing to fear from either the people or the Romans. From the first they must have had the power to challenge obedience,—that in all governments, (and much more so in the Jewish,) being due to those who have the supreme authority; besides, from the people they had nothing to fear, for they were, it appears, clamorous for his execution.

And as for the Romans,—if the Sanhedrin could try, condemn, and execute, by their *own* sole authority, then

* Univ. Hist. Vol. x. p. 386.

† Dr. Warburton, applying this prophecy in a different sense, "thinks the continuance of the power of life and death amongst a tributary people a perplexed question."

‡ Univ. Hist. Vol. x. p. 593.

were they safe in doing so, with respect to them. Besides, the Romans knew nothing of Jesus, and their usage of him shows how little they valued him; and therefore the Sanhedrin could have run no risk, had they asserted their own supreme power. The second motive, has as little foundation. For it is not at all probable or consistent that the supreme legislature, tenacious of their power and privileges and a strict adherence to the laws, which they deemed sacred, should here all at once, not only give them up, but act contrary to the very constitution, and that in an affair the most trivial, nothing more than the inflicting one kind of death instead of another; for the power of punishing with death is what they say the Sanhedrin had, to prove which they instance the case of Stephen, and say, "He was regularly tried, condemned and stoned by their single authority."* Now I think that the contrary to this representation is plain from the passage itself: Stephen might indeed be brought to his examination as is related; but there is no regular condemnation, nor sentence pronounced. The fact was this: The people, being exasperated at his behaviour, tumultuously "ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city and stoned him."† It manifestly was a violent act of the people, without either condemnation or sentence, and in this very light it is represented in the Acts; so that I think nothing offered by these historians any way proves their point, or carries the least colour of probability. I find it said by way of excuse, "That if Jesus Christ and his Apostles did not make use of this passage to prove the coming of the Messiah, it was

* Univ. Hist. Vol. x. p. 593.

† Acts vii. 57, 58.

because then the completion of this prophecy was not sufficiently manifest.”* In one of my letters I took notice of the authors of the Universal History affirming, “that King Ahaz could not be ignorant from this prophecy that the sceptre was not to depart from Judah till Shiloh was come;”† by which means, these historians honour Ahaz with having a more minute and perfect knowledge of this prophecy, eight hundred years before the completion in Jesus, than either Jesus himself, or his Apostles; for if it was not sufficiently manifest, either to the person in whom it was accomplished, or to those who lived and wrote long after the conversion of Cornelius (nay, St. John wrote even after the destruction of Jerusalem) who had all those manifesting circumstances to guide them in applying it, and an opportunity from thence of proving his character, how absurd must it appear to make Ahaz have any such knowledge! For how could it be plain to Ahaz, who had not those manifesting circumstances to guide him, which Jesus and his Apostles had?—circumstances, indeed, so very dark when they happened, as to be incapable of guiding the persons themselves whom it concerned, and gave no proof, even to those (the inspired) whose business it was to show its completion; and, since neither from the event, nor from the assistance of the Spirit which guided them, they could *discern* or discover the accomplishment, we may reasonably conclude, that this passage concerned not Jesus at all, and also that Ahaz was entirely ignorant of its having any such meaning.

There is another thing which I must take notice of, and

* Cal. Dic. on the word Shiloh.

† See my 12th Letter; also, Univ. Hist. Vol. x. p. 155.

that is, that Jacob gave each of his children a particular, separate blessing, considering each of his sons in their posterity as twelve different tribes; consequently the blessing was peculiar to each tribe; for "all these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing, he blessed them."* The blessing to Judah must therefore be limited to his particular tribe or his descendants. I make this observation, because Christian commentators do artfully transfer the supreme legislative power (in which they make the sceptre to consist) to those who held the power or magistracy in the land of Judea; though that power had long before departed from Judah, in the person of Zedekiah, the last of Judah's descendants that held the power or sceptre, never afterwards returning in any of his descendants, excepting Zerubbabel, who held it by the appointment of another, *and that* only for a limited time,—the government being afterwards in the tribe of Levi, and others, but not in the tribe or descendants of Judah, as is manifest from the history of those times. Therefore it is absurd to pretend to extend the blessing of Judah, which was his particular privilege, to others.

LETTER XXII.

I CONCLUDED my last with the observation that the Patriarch's blessing was particular to each tribe. "For since Jacob gave his blessing to every one of his children, no

* Gen. xlix. 28.

doubt but he promised there some particular advantage to the tribe of Judah ; and notwithstanding (says Basnage) that opinion has not appeared favourable to Christians, truth must always be preferred to interest."* I shall now give that explanation of the famous passage, which to me seems the plainest and most conformable to the literal meaning and import of the text. The following advantages are then promised to Judah :—

1st. That this tribe should be respected by the others for its courage and intrepidity.

2dly. That it was to hold the sceptre, or have pre-eminence above the other tribes.

3dly. That it should have its lawgiver or supreme legislature within itself, independent or separate from the rest of the tribes.

4thly. That these advantages they should possess till the coming of Shiloh, who was to unite the people under his obedience and government,

5thly. A more considerable inheritance.

These are the advantages promised to Judah, and the blessing will then run thus :

Judah, (says the Patriarch,) thou shalt have the praise of thy brethren ; thy father's children shall bow down to thee ; for thy courage and intrepidity shall draw their respect and obedience ; the sceptre (or pre-eminence) shall not depart from Judah, (the tribe collectively,) nor a lawgiver (or supreme legislature and independent power within itself) from between his feet, until Shiloh (or him to whom it belongs) shall come, (to whom all the people shall be

* His. and Rel. of the Jews, Book iv. ch. 21.

gathered,) [or] unto him shall the gathering of the people be : binding his foal unto the vine, &c. To avoid needless disputes concerning words, I shall fix the meaning of those made use of by the Patriarch in a sense given them by Christian commentators.

1st. By the word *shebet* (or sceptre) I with Basnage “understand a degree of pre-eminence which distinguished the tribe of Judah, as kings are distinguished in their own dominions. Judah carried the sceptre (says he) because it had a great pre-eminence.”

2dly. *By the word *mechokek*, (translated lawgiver,) I with the generality of commentators understand a supreme legislative power.

3dly. By the word Shiloh, I with sundry (and in particular with the authors of the Universal History) understand, he to whom it belongs, drawing it from Shiloh.†

4thly. By the word *'ad*, I take in the sense in which it is rendered in the English version, (until.) Having fixed the meaning of the words in the sense given them by the adversaries, that no exception may be made, it remains now that we show how this prophecy received its accomplishments. I shall confine myself to those propositions which are matter of controversy; for as to the first, that is, the tribe of Judah being respected for its numbers, courage, and intrepidity, as likewise its having a larger share of the land and the most fertile soil, it is, I think, agreed on all hands. The sceptre or pre-eminence which the tribe of Judah held above the rest, is made evident from Scripture. It was foremost in the encampment,‡ and had precedence in march-

* Bas. His. and Rel. of the Jews, Book iv. ch. 21.

† Vol. iii. p. 318.

‡ Numb. ii. 3.

ing.* When the altar was dedicated, this tribe by its prince had the privilege of the first day's offering,† and by God's appointment led the van in battle.‡ “In short, Judah prevailed over his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler.”§ That the sceptre or this pre-eminence over the other tribes never departed from Judah, is evident from the words of David. “The LORD God of Israel (says he) chose me before all the house of my father, to be a king over Israel for ever; for he hath chosen *Judah to be the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father, he liked me, to make me king over all Israel.*”|| Having proved the pre-eminence or sceptre which this tribe held over the rest, we must now proceed to prove its supreme legislative power, independent of the other tribes, which with the pre-eminence (or sceptre) was to last till the coming of the Shiloh, him to whom the kingdom belonged, under whom all the tribes should be united. The independency of the tribe of Judah, its constituting a particular separate republic, and consequently its having its lawgiver or supreme judicature within itself, appears from the following circumstances :

1st. After the victory which Deborah obtained over Sisera, she in her song upon that deliverance praises and mentions all the tribes excepting Judah, (the most numerous and most valiant of all;)|| from which it is inferred that this tribe was not under the subjection of Jabin, but being independent from the rest, and constituting within itself a separate republic, did not think itself engaged to join the others in a war in

* Num. x. 4.

† Num. vii. 12.

‡ Jud. i. 20, & xx. 18.

§ 1 Chron. v. 2.

|| Ibid. xxviii. 4.

¶ Jud. v.

which it was not concerned; for had this tribe partaken or been under the same government as the rest, it must necessarily have joined them; and if it had, it would have shared in the praises bestowed on the others.

2dly. It appears that this tribe was not under the same government as the others, from their binding and delivering up Samson, the judge of Israel, to the Philistines, when he took shelter among them; which shows that they were not under his government, and consequently they must have been a particular separate republic.*

3dly. From this tribe being named and numbered separately from others, which shows that they were deemed separate and independent from the rest.†

4thly. When the love which the people bore to David is expressed, distinct mention is made of Judah as in contradistinction to Israel, which shows them a distinct people, independent of the rest.‡

5thly, and lastly. That they had a distinct, independent government is very plain from their anointing David their king, whilst the other tribes, or all Israel, adhered to Ishbosheth, from whence it is evident and plain that they were neither bound by the decision of the other tribes,—nor paid they any regard to their decrees, being a different and independent government, which continued till they were united under David, the Shiloh or Shilo—he to whom the kingdom belonged. This prophecy received its accomplishment in David, to whom the people were gathered. When Israel and Judah united under one monarch or head, the Shiloh, or he to whom the kingdom belonged by God's own

* Jud. xv. 9, 13.

† 1 Sam. xi. 8.

‡ Ibid. xviii. 16.

appointment, a descendant of Judah, took possession ; for to him came all the tribes of Israel, and spoke, saying : “ Behold we are thy bone and thy flesh, also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that led out, and brought in Israel ; and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel ; so all the elders of Israel came to the king of Hebron to make David king over Israel.”* “ All these men of war that could keep rank came with a perfect heart to Hebron to make David king over Israel, and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king.”† Here then we have an accomplishment of every part of this prophecy according to the limitation of the Patriarch, who gave a particular distinct blessing to each tribe, and consequently one to Judah. “ This sense,” (to use the words of the authors of the Universal History,) “ seems the most easy, natural, and agreeable to the original.” We differ in the following particulars :‡

1st. They will have the sceptre to mean the supreme power of the Sanhedrin, which they pretend was possessed by that council, though in reality they had lost it long before ; whilst I, agreeable to some of their writers, make the sceptre to consist in the pre-eminence which Judah held over the rest of the tribes.

2dly. In like manner they will have the lawgiver to be the Sanhedrin, which I make to consist in this tribe’s having a distinct judicature within itself, independent of the rest.

3dly. They will have Shiloh to be Jesus, whom they style

* 2 Sam. v. 1–3. † 1 Chro. xii. 38. ‡ See Vol. iii. pp. 317, 319.

the king of kings; whilst I think the passage most applicable to David, the literal king of Israel and Judah.

4thly. They will have the gathering of the people to mean the conversion of Cornelius; whilst I think it was literally fulfilled when all the tribes gathered to make David king, and by their union under his government.

Now which of us has better applied the prophecy, or best kept to its most literal sense and meaning, is what you must determine. According to my hypothesis, there is no necessity of having recourse to forced constructions, unnatural interpretations, or imaginary events, mere "ipse dixits," nor of transferring the events from the tribe of Judah to that of Levi, or to any person whatsoever. I have often wondered at the pains which is taken to make out Jesus's lineal descent from David, which being attended with insurmountable difficulties, they have not hitherto been able to do. It has also been surprising to many that they have not taken refuge in the easy mystic tropological sense, and so fall on some method of spiritualising the Shiloh promised to Judah. This might be done in like manner as they have made some passages and things to stand for and mean their very opposites. Have they not changed earth into heaven?—Jerusalem and Zion into Christian churches?—placed the gentiles for Israel and Judah?—turned glorious times in the most troublesome?—deliverance and liberty into slavery and oppression, &c.? why might not any person besides a descendant of David be made to stand for Shiloh, and save themselves the necessary trouble of doing that which is impossible, that is, showing him to be descended from David? Were they to defend Jesus's descent from David to give him possession of his throne, kingdom and government, they

would then act consistently ; but to these Jesus never laid the least claim ; notwithstanding which they think it absolutely necessary that Jesus should be descended from the royal house of that monarch, without which they think he could neither be the Shiloh promised, nor lay claim to the messiahship. This then being a matter of importance, I shall in my next examine the evidence of his descent from David.

LETTER XXIII.

THE Messiah's descent from David being (as I observed in my last) deemed by Christians a necessary circumstance or qualification in the person who should pretend to that character, more than ordinary pains are taken to make out Jesus's descent, as a thing of the utmost importance. In vain do commentators puzzle themselves to make out this descent: the genealogies delivered by Matthew and Luke do but increase the difficulties, and they are reduced to shifts and assertions peculiar to the cause. "Notwithstanding our Saviour's voluntary appearance," says Doctor Echard, "under these mean circumstances, we are to remember that even in his human capacity he was true heir to the kingdom of Israel, which had been by God entailed upon David and his posterity, so that he was the king of the Jews in a natural and legal, as well as spiritual and divine sense ; and this appears not only from former pro-

phacies, types, and other circumstances, but also from the genealogy of our Saviour's ancestors, given us by the evangelists Matthew and Luke,—which genealogies, though they have their difficulties and their seeming disagreements, yet they both manifest him to be of the line of David; the former draws the pedigree of his reputed father Joseph, and the latter that of his mother Mary.”* But this is a mere invention, a direct contradiction to the genealogies, which are only of Joseph, and of him only, he being the person mentioned in both to be the descendant of those ancestors, and not a word is said of Mary. The authors of the Universal History assert the same, and declare them both of the house and lineage of David, and in their notes add:—“We have taken notice in a former volume that the Jews had a law which expressly forbade heiresses to marry out of their own tribes. It is true, the Virgin Mary seems to have been far enough from being one of that sort, at least in possession, whatever there might be in reversion, or by virtue of the jubilee laws;—but there was still a much greater tie which kept the virgins of the tribe of Judah, but especially those of the house of David, from marrying into another tribe or family, namely, the sure expectation which they had that the Messiah was to be of that lineage, and to be born in Bethlehem, the city and patrimony of that monarch; and how careful every family was to preserve their genealogy, needs not to be repeated.” And they then add:—“It is therefore vain that the Jews exclaim against the uncertainty of Christ's being the seed of David, because Joseph's and not Mary's genealogy is deduced from him by

* *Introd. to His.*, Vol. i. p. 42.

the two Evangelists, who is yet affirmed by them to have had no share in his conception. The certainty of the Virgin's descent from that house is rendered evident enough by what we have observed above, especially if we add the testimony of the Evangelists themselves, who call her miraculous child the son or descendant of David. If it be asked, Why they choose rather to give us that of her husband? it may be answered, that they conformed in it to the custom of the Hebrews, and even of the sacred writers, who deduce their genealogies from the male rather than the female line; for if Christ, the son of Mary, was the son or descendant of David, it must follow that his mother must be so too."* I have cited these historians at length, that you might better take a view of their arguments and chain of reasoning; and now let us consider their proofs as to their asserting that both Joseph and Mary were of the lineage of David; as it is of no weight—it is their proofs which we must consider. The first proof is the Jews, having a law forbidding their heiresses marrying out of their tribes; but as they tell us Mary was far enough from being an heiress, this, of course, is no proof that she was a descendant from, or of the line of David, even though she had been an heiress. Their second proof is an invention, "A tie which they pretend was upon the virgins of the tribe of Judah, and especially on those of the house of David, from an expectation that the Messiah was to proceed from that lineage, and to be born in Bethlehem; for which reason they were not to marry in another tribe or family." But this can be no proof that Mary was of that lineage; the proof that she was

* Vol. x. p. 451.

lineally descended from that monarch should first have been made manifest; that done, then the proofs, that the virgins of the tribes of Judah were under that tie, would have been right. But here no proof is brought of Mary's lineal descent, nor any proof that the virgins of that tribe were under any such tie; and their asserting this without any authority is a sufficient confutation. Besides, is it probable or reasonable to think that the virgins of that tribe would put themselves under the disadvantageous tie of refusing a good offer for that which they knew nothing of?—for the Messiah might as well be born from a woman of any other tribe married into that of Judah; consequently they had but little chance, and at most it could only have been the privilege of one of them. No such consideration, I am sure, would actuate the young ladies in any other country; why, then, should we think those of Judah should act contrary to the innate inclinations of their sex without any appearance of advantage? But nothing can be more ridiculous than their saying, that “It is therefore in vain that the Jews exclaim against the uncertainty of Christ being of the seed of David.” One would think they had, beyond all dispute, made out Jesus's descent, and so ridiculed the Jews for their vanity in objecting to that which they had so plainly made out; and, indeed, as they say that “the certainty of the Virgin's descent from that house is rendered evident enough from what they observe above,” it put me upon examining what they had said to prove this point, but was surprised to find the only arguments made use of to be those of the “heiresses' being forbid marrying out of their tribe,” and the pretended tie on the virgins of “the tribe of Judah, in expectation that the Messiah was

to be born of them." But how these assertions prove Mary to have been descended from the royal house of David, is past my abilities to find out. Thus much is certain, whatever they may pretend, Joseph's and not Mary's genealogy is deduced *from David* by the two Evangelists, so that from the genealogies, which they give us, nothing can be drawn or extended to Mary. This is all that the Jews pretend; for though these historians insinuate as if the Jews affirmed that Joseph had no share in his conception, yet they well know it is not the Jews who say so, but the Evangelists who declare it: "And he (Joseph) knew her (Mary) not till she had brought forth her first-born son." Therefore it is the Christians, with the Evangelists at their head, who affirm it. The Jews knew nothing concerning these transactions: all that the Jews pretended to insinuate is, that if Joseph be not Jesus' father, he from those genealogies cannot be proved to be a descendant from David, neither are Christians able to make it out.

To the foregoing proofs they "add the testimony of the Evangelists themselves, who call her miraculous child the son or descendant of David;" but this proves nothing.—1st. Because the Jews admit not their authority. 2dly. Because their calling him the son of David* can be no proof of his descent; because, as we proved from Mr. Locke, the calling him so means no more than that he was the Messiah. 3dly. By the same rule that Luke supposes him to be Joseph's son, or, if you please, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph,† when in fact he was not, since "he had no share in his conception," so might the other Evan-

* Matt. i. 1.

† Luke iii. 23.

gelist suppose him to have been the son of David, though in fact he might not be so. In short, it is from facts alone we are to form our judgment, and none of the Evangelists mention any thing concerning his ancestors. "The Scripture," says Calmet, "tells us nothing of her parents, not so much as their names."* All that they say concerning her parentage is, that she was related to Elizabeth, who, we are told, was of the daughters of Aaron.† "If it be asked," continue the historians, "why they choose to give us that of her husband: it may be answered that they conformed in it to the custom of the Hebrews, and even of the sacred writers, who deduce their genealogies from the male line." This proves that the male line alone constituted a right, and that it was of no consequence of what line the mother was, or from whom she descended. Now if he was not Joseph's son, he was no more the son or descendant of David than of Jeroboam, for any thing that appears, and consequently could not claim the kingdom of that monarch by his lineal descent. The Messiah's right to the kingdom of Israel is so necessary a qualification—give me leave to repeat it—that "we ought to remember," says Dr. Echard, "that even in his human capacity he was true heir to the kingdom of Israel, which had been by God entailed upon David and his posterity; so that he was the king of the Jews in a natural and legal, as well as spiritual and divine sense; and this appears not only from former prophecies, types, and other circumstances, but also from the genealogy of our Saviour's ancestors, given by the two Evangelists, Matthew and Luke, which genealogies, though they have

* See his Dictionary, on the word Mary.

† Luke i. 5.

their difficulties and seeming disagreements, yet they both manifest him to be of the line of David,"* which might possibly be, had he been the son of Joseph, whose ancestors those genealogies describe; but his not being Joseph's son, the genealogies, though full of difficulties and contradictions, can give him no legal right.

And the learned Doctor seems to have been so possessed with the divine indefeasible right, that he again takes up the subject. "Jesus," says he, "being rightful and legal king of the Jews, and that only by his reputed father's side"—(if so, how could his title descend to Jesus?)—"is an unanswerable argument both against those who affirm Joseph to have had other children by a former wife, as also against those who deny the perpetual virginity of Mary, affirming that Joseph had often children by her after the birth of Jesus; for had Joseph had any children, either by Mary or any other wife, they, as coming from the elder branch by Joseph, their father, must have claimed the inheritance of his kingdom in his right, and not Jesus, the son of Mary, who descended from a younger line, and therefore could not legally inherit but upon default of issue from Joseph, the only remaining heir of the elder; so that Joseph was the very last of the royal line of David, which was fully terminated in him."† I know that you see the fallacy of all this; yet it is on such evidence that foundation is laid for raising a most extraordinary superstructure. Now if Jesus was that rightful and legal king of the Jews, how came he to declare "his kingdom was not to be of this world?" If his title was so clear, how came the Jews to

* *Introd. to his History*, p. 42.

† *Ibid.* p. 43.

disown him? Did he ever claim his inheritance then possessed by Romans? No doubt but the reverend Doctor can prove that he did; for if no claim was to be made, why so much pains to prove the right? I think Joseph acted the most prudent in maintaining himself by his labour rather than to engage in a contest, or exert his right. And why might not Joseph's children have sat down contented and easy in like manner as their father did?—for who in his senses would claim such a kingdom, or be such a king? so that it is no argument, much less an unanswerable one, either of Joseph's not having other children, or of Mary's perpetual virginity. But that he had other children is plain; for when the Evangelist relates how Jesus was despised by his countrymen, the people say: "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brothers, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?"* And though his behaviour, either towards his mother or brethren, is not represented in the best light,† yet it proves Joseph had other children, and those probably by Mary; since the Evangelist declares "that he knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born," plainly indicating "that he had knowledge of her afterwards." But that Jesus was the last of the royal line of David, his whole posterity becoming extinct in him, is as extraordinary an assertion as any of the rest. In short, they grope in the dark, and care not either what they say or what they affirm; if they could but establish their point, no matter for the evidence, or whom they contradict.

To return to the authors of the Universal History, their

* Matt. xiii. 55, 56.

† Ibid. xii. 47; Mark iii. 31; Luke viii. 20.

last proof is this: "If Christ, the son of Mary," say they, "was the son or descended of David, it follows that his mother must be so too;" but this is a fallacious proof, (*rather begging the question*;) for the question is, Whether Mary (for Joseph, not being his father, is consequently out of the question,) is a descendant of David. Had they made that out, then they might have concluded that her son was so too. Here the thing to be proved is taken for granted, and then a conclusion is drawn from it; but the Jews will say: If there be no proof that Mary is descended from David, there can be, consequently, none that Jesus was, the latter proceeding from the former, and not the mother from the son. This is inverting the order of things: therefore if Mary's descent cannot be proved, the consequence is that her son's cannot. I shall take no notice of the ineffectual endeavours made to reconcile the different genealogies of Matthew and Luke: this labour is not only vain, but even absurd; for after all, neither of them can serve their cause, because they reject Joseph, Mary's husband, from being Jesus' father, and the genealogies concern him, and him only; so that if Shiloh was to be of the tribe of Judah, it does not appear that Jesus was he, his descent not being ascertained or proved.

LETTER XXIV.

EXTRAORDINARY are the pains which have been taken, and the stress laid by Christian commentators on the famous prophecy of Daniel's seventy weeks, as if Christianity could

not subsist without it; or, as if the very being of religion depended on the application of this prophecy to Jesus, whom they make to be the Messiah, or Anointed, there mentioned. It is thus translated in the English Bible :

“ At the beginning of the supplications,” (says the angel to Daniel,) “ the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore, understand, the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”*

The computations which are made of these seventy weeks, by the most learned, are so different and contradictory to

* Daniel ix. 23, to the end.

each other, and the calculations do so vary from one another's hypothesis, as ought, one would think, to convince them of the impracticableness of making the application of it to Jesus, and consequently, of the impossibilities of making it answer their purpose. Its obscurity is confessed by all, and you will hardly find two intelligent persons who agree in their computations; difficulties surround them whichever way they take; how to make or strike out Jesus for the Messiah or Anointed, who was to be cut off, is the thing they aim at; but where to begin the computation of the weeks, how to continue them, and what time to end them,—so that every period may have a proper epoch, are matters of the greatest difficulties and differences amongst the expositors. To make the prophecy answer the event they would apply it to, they shorten or lengthen the chronology of those times, (which of itself is dark and perplexed,) extending or diminishing the reigns of Persian monarchs, as may best square with their different hypotheses which, after all the trouble and pains they take, are liable to most potent objections and insurmountable difficulties. The authors of the Universal History, after mentioning in very contemptuous terms, (as is their custom,) the differences which subsist among the Jewish authors, and asserting their ignorance as chronological calculators, proceed to give us the following account:—

“The Christians (say they) are not exactly agreed, either in the placing the beginning or end of these weeks, or in the calculations of those lunar or Jewish years; both differences, however, are inconsiderable if duly attended to; the former is entirely owing to our imperfect knowledge of the chronology of those times; had we a sure guide in it, the

points would not be long unsettled ; but, whilst in this uncertainty, one author will place the beginning at the decree of Cyrus, another at that of Darius, a third at that of Artaxerxes Longimanus, and each of them endeavours to stretch or shorten the chronology of each interval, as best suits with his hypothesis, it is no wonder there is so little agreement among them, and so little certainty to be gathered from the whole dispute.”*

If these things are thus, can the Jews be blamed in rejecting their application of this prophecy, computed as is acknowledged “both without any perfect knowledge of the chronology of those times, or any sure guide in it?” Upon what grounds, then, can they pretend either to fix or urge this prophecy? and does it not betray pitiful shifts (or something worse) in thus shortening and stretching each interval as best suits their different views, and is it not using unfair and unwarrantable means? Here let me observe, that which in the Jewish authors betrayed their ignorance, and showed their pitiful shifts, † passes unanswered in the others; though one should think that design (for ignorant they must not be supposed) deserved not less rebuke than ignorance. These authors having made mention of lunar years, by which some reckon in order to bring the time nearer to the event, to which they endeavour to make application of this prophecy: it will be sufficient to observe with the judicious Prideaux, that, “when Daniel had this prophecy revealed unto him, by the angel Gabriel, there was not any form of year purely lunar any where in use; but of the ancients, we find none who followed this form; and who can

* Univ. Hist., Vol. x. p. 446.

† Ibid. p. 447.

think then, that in the collective sum of seventy weeks or four hundred and ninety years, of them the angel should intend a computation, which was then nowhere in practice the whole world over?"* "Waving (what these authors call) some minute differences" they proceed to give us the system most universally received, and they tell us that, "The difference of time is trifling at most, but nine or ten years between those who make it longest and those who make it shortest; and who can wonder at it or urge it as an objection against this prophecy," &c.† Against the prophecy none will; neither will the Jews wonder at the difference, and will give this reason, because the event, to which it is applied, could not be that intended by the angel; for whatever trifling difference they may think of nine or ten years, yet where there is a determined portion of time fixed, the accomplishment must be exact; otherwise, instead of seventy weeks, the angel ought to have said seventy-one weeks and a half; therefore, it is a very material difference; for it makes the time extend farther than the determined bounds set by the angel. Their hypothesis is to begin the seventy weeks from the decree granted to Nehemiah, by Artaxerxes, in the twentieth year of his reign, and end them at the death of Jesus; but to this computation, there are great objections; for it exceeds the four hundred and ninety years by ten years, as their historians acknowledge, or rather thirteen, as Dean Prideaux makes it appear. "And therefore, (says he,) if the four hundred and ninety years of the seventy weeks be computed from thence, they will over-shoot the death of Christ thirteen years, which being

* Connect. Vol. ii. p. 404-6.

† Uni. Hist. Vol. x. p. 448.

the grand event to be brought to pass at the conclusion of these weeks, it is certain they can never there have their beginning from whence they can never be brought to this ending."* To remedy this evil, some have invented (though without the least foundation or authority) that Artaxerxes reigned ten years with his father, and so pretended it to be only the tenth of his reigning alone, making up by invention what is wanting in exactness; but there is nothing (says Prideaux) in the history of those times that can give countenance to this conjecture.† Besides, according to this hypothesis, they make one continued series of time without making any epochs to the division, as made by the angel, and notwithstanding, the angel declares the commandment to have gone forth, yet they contradict him and make that commandment to be one that was given near ninety years after. I suppose, with Prideaux, that the commandment mentioned by the angel to be that of Cyrus, which he very learnedly proves to be the decree literally meant by the angel, declaring that it "can be applicable to no other restoring and rebuilding of Jerusalem, than that which was decreed and commanded by Cyrus, at the return of the captivity;‡ and therefore, if these words of the prophecy to restore and rebuild Jerusalem are to be understood in a literal sense, they can be understood of no other restoring and building of that city, than that which was accomplished by virtue of that decree; and the computation of the seventy weeks must begin from the granting and going forth thereof."§ According to which, the literal accomplishment of this prophecy

* Connect. Vol. ii. p. 403.

† Ibid. p. 382.

‡ Ibid. p. 406.

§ Ibid. p. 386.

must have its completion from the going forth of that decree; and whoever begins the same from any other, cannot pretend to make it a literal prophecy. Other difficulties there are which arise from this hypothesis in common with others, such as the confirmation of the covenant with many for one week, (to which they are entirely silent,) the time of the Messiah's being cut off, the overspreading of abominations, which shall be taken notice of in my observations on the next hypothesis, that of the learned Prideaux, which these historians recommend.

The Doctor very judiciously objects to the calculations and hypotheses which terminate in Jesus different from his, showing their absurdity, and the impossibility of terminating them in that event; and therefore begins his own computation of the seventy weeks, from the seventh of Artaxerxes, when Ezra began to execute his commission.* For reckoning or calculating the time backward, he finds, from the death of Jesus to the execution of the said commission, just four hundred and ninety years:† he therefore takes the commandment of the seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety years, not literally, but in a figurative sense,‡ and this he does for a very obvious reason; for having proved, as I before observed, that the commandment for restoring and building Jerusalem, could be no other but Cyrus' decree, "If (says he) the computation be begun so high, the four hundred and ninety years of the said seventy weeks cannot come low enough to reach any of the events predicted by the prophecy, (he means those to which Christians would extend the prophecy;) for from the first of Cyrus to the death of Christ,

* Con. Vol. ii. p. 377.

† Ibid. 381.

‡ Ibid. 382.

were five hundred and sixty-eight years; and, therefore, if the said four hundred and ninety years be computed from thence, they will be expired a great many years either before the cutting off, or the coming of the Messiah."* As he sets out, or begins his computation from a supposed figurative prediction of the angel, so he continues the events in the same sense, making the streets and city to mean figuratively, church and state.† And the ditch, he makes a figurative expression, for good constitutions and establishment.‡ Indeed, he is not silent (as the authors of the Universal History are), concerning the confirming the covenant with many for one week, he says this "was done by Jesus confirming for one week, that is, for the space of seven years, the covenant of the gospel with many of the Jews."§ Now how, or from what authority he does this, when Christians as well as himself, declare and assert that his gospel "was not a temporal law, as was that of Moses; but to last for ever, and to be a guide unto all righteousness as long as the world should last,"|| and yet reduce it to only a seven years' covenant, seems very strange and contradictory. They find it not less difficult how to make out the fulfilling of that part of the prophecy, which declares that the sacrifice and oblations should cease in the midst of the last week, which none in fact pretended did literally happen; because they continued for a long time after, even to the destruction of the city. This difficulty is got over, not by pretending they actually did cease, for it is acknowledged that they did not so "till the destruction of the temple, about forty years after; but by pretending that they lost their efficacy, and

* Con. Vol. ii. p. 386.

‡ Ibid. 416.

† Ibid. 415.

|| Ibid. 380.

‡ Ibid. 416.

became useless and insignificant, after the grand sacrifice of the saviour of the world;”* but for this you must take their word. Most remarkable is the fulfilling of this part of the prophecy, as made out by Prideaux; for he has not the patience to wait till the death of Jesus, but anticipates it by half a week; for he tells us “that he should in the half past week, that is, in the latter part of it, cause the sacrifice and oblations of the temple to cease, and in the conclusion of the whole, that is, in the precise ending of the seventy weeks, be cut off and die, and accordingly (this he asserts with great assurance) all this was exactly fulfilled, and was brought to pass;”† so that according to him, they must have lost their efficacy before the death of Jesus: and if this be so, what becomes of all the types of Christ’s sacrifice, which they are made to prefigure? They pretend, by what rule of language I know not, that the overspreading of abominations “Sufficiently prefigures the Roman eagles set up in the temple;”‡ which is false in fact, none being set up there, as the same was in flames before it was taken;§ neither did the Romans set up there any idolatry at all. They are all so greatly perplexed how to make out and apply that part of the prophecy which mentions, “the people of the prince that shall come,” some applying the passage to the Romans under Titus, others to Jesus himself. But the first it cannot be, because the whole extent of the prophecy terminates at the death of Jesus, and all the events mentioned, were to happen within that space; consequently, Titus with the Romans, who laid seige to Jerusalem many years after, cannot be the person intended; neither can it

* Uni. His. Vol. x. p. 449.

‡ Uni. His. Vol. x. p. 449.

† Prid. Con. Vol. ii. p. 416.

§ Ibid. 663, 664.

be Jesus who had been cut off long before. The prophecy declares positively, that the Messiah or Anointed was to be cut off after the sixty-second week; whereas the authors of the Universal History stretch it to the sixty-ninth week, and Prideaux to the seventieth, which is a contradiction of the prophecy; for, if the Messiah was not to be cut off till the sixty-ninth or seventieth week, that period would undoubtedly have been fixed by the angel, and not the sixty-second. In short, considering their assertions made without the least foundation, and contrary not only to the prophecy, but also to facts, you will have less cause to be surprised at what is generally asserted by them concerning the finishing of transgression, making an end of sins, reconciliation for iniquities, and the bringing in everlasting righteousness, on which, and the sealing up the vision and prophecy, and the anointing the most Holy, they run out and descant most notably; an instance of this you have in Prideaux, all which he makes to be accomplished, "in the great work of our salvation, undertaken by Jesus, fully completed by his death, passion, and resurrection. Being born without original sin, and living without actual sin, he was the most holy of all—he was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and with power to be king, priest, and prophet, which offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross, making thereby an end of sin, in so doing he did work reconciliation for us with our God," It is a pity that the learned author had not proved every one of these particular points; for it is impossible that any one can consider all these events thus put together, and think that they came to pass, or were brought about by Jesus. A transition of our thoughts, and a little reflection on the wickedness of the times in which he lived,

the perpetual divisions, and continual crimes or unrighteousness of the church from the beginning down to this time, must surely make it not only impossible, but ridiculous to pretend to do it; the contradictions must appear so glaring to any person anywise acquainted with the history of the church and its proceedings, as must occasion (*force*) a conclusion entirely opposite; for it must naturally lead him to think, that nothing like that which is pretended ever happened, and that consequently the prophecy could never terminate in Jesus.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXV.

WE are told by Father Calmet that there are many different hypotheses concerning Daniel's seventy weeks, even among Christian writers—some begin them from the first year of Darius, the Mede, which is the epoch of Daniel's prophecy, and make them determine at the profanation of the temple, which happened under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. Others begin them from the first year of Cyrus at Babylon, and place the end of them at the destruction of the Temple by the Romans. Others fix the beginning at the first year of Darius the Mede, in which the revelation was made to Daniel, and put the end at the birth of Jesus Christ; Julius Africanus begins the seventy weeks at the second year of Artaxerxes, and makes them terminate at

the death of the Messiah.* This Julius Africanus flourished in the third century, and, if I mistake not, was the first that calculated the seventy weeks to apply them to Jesus, which none of the New Testament writers, or any other had yet done, or found out any such meaning, though they lived long enough, every one having written after their pretended accomplishment at Jesus' death. Thus you see nothing is left unattempted to make out the accomplishment of this prophecy. But "let them understand by week, weeks of years (though there be no foundation in the Old Testament for the use of the word), or what other portion of time they think fit; let them understand by a year the Jewish or Chaldean, a lunar or solar year; let them begin the weeks in the year of Cyrus, or Darius, or Xerxes, or in the seventh or twentieth of Aataxerxes Longimanus, or when Daniel had his vision; let them fix the time of Jesus' birth, or beginning to preach, or death, when they please; and let them assign the time of the expiration of the seventy weeks, which is variously fixed, when they please: yet cannot this prophecy be made to square to the event they would refer it to, and will after all be subject to great difficulties."† "Many other writers (says Mr. Woolston) besides the Bishop of Litchfield, such as Dr. Clark, Dr. Marshall, Mr. Whiston, and Mr. Sykes, have to their power urged this prophecy against the author of the Grounds; and indeed it was unavoidable, and not to be passed over in silence by them; since that author, by his insinuations, had objected to the obscurity of this prophecy, the difficulty of its application, and the difference amongst expositors in the computation of the

* Vide the article Weeks.

† Grounds and Reasons, p. 250.

time mentioned in it; and therefore the said writers against the Grounds were in the right on it, almost every one to contend for the truth of this prophecy, and to illustrate it; and if they had all jumped in their numerical and chronogical notions with the least show of exactness, they had done somewhat to the purpose. But alas! they are so unhappily divided amongst themselves as any before them, in their way of arithmetic and chronology: and good Mr. Whiston is so offended with the Bishop of Litchfield and Dr. Clarke for their computation of Daniels' weeks, that he could not forbear writing against them."*

These differences are enough to make us say, that where there is so little agreement, little certainty can be expected; † and you will less wonder at finding some of the most eminent Christian chronologists and expounders give up the application of this prophecy and its accomplishment in Jesus, and endeavour at a different computation and application, ending the seventy weeks, and the events therein mentioned in the times of Antiochus Epiphanes, this being the epoch assigned to the prophecy also by some of the best Jewish authors, the other event being neither satisfactory nor literally fulfilled. For the truth of this we may appeal to almost every Christian commentator. I shall instance in this the judicious Prideaux, who, after the great trouble and pains he had been at to fix his own, and overthrow all other hypotheses, concludes by declaring, "that there are many difficulties in it, must be acknowledged; the perplexities which many learned men have been led to, in their explications of it, do sufficiently prove it; and the under-

* Dissert. on Daniels' Weeks, p. 4.

† Un. Hist. Vol. x. p. 448.

standing in a literal sense, what is there meant in a figurative, hath not been the least cause thereof."* Let them give up all pretensions, and not lay any stress or urge it against the Jews, unless they are able to clear it of the many difficulties with which it is clogged; and experience ought to convince them of the impracticability of doing it. I shall now give you that explanation and application of this prophecy which to me appears the best.

I was once of opinion that no person could ever be able to know or ascertain the true meaning and import of this prophecy; it always appeared to me to be a particular revelation made to Daniel, who was favoured with the foreknowledge of many future events, particularly with some remarkable transactions which should within a limited space of time befall his people; and as it was not necessary that any other person should have, or attain to, the like knowledge, it was for that reason revealed in such terms as should evade the conjectures of all inquirers. The divisions amongst expositors, who hardly agree in any one circumstance, helped to confirm me in this opinion, and their endeavouring to apply and extend the prophecy to a favourite event, or a particular hypothesis, rather than sincerely endeavour to find out its true meaning, greatly increases the difficulties. I have already shown the impossibility of extending it to one event to which it has, with great pain and labour, been endeavoured to make it answer. It now remains that I make it square with a very different event, to which I think it better corresponds. Probability is in my opinion the highest degree we can arrive at. It was the angel indeed who made

* Connect. ii. p. 441.

Daniel to know and understand (with a fixed certainty no doubt) its import, meaning and application; but as no other person was ever favoured with the like privilege, it would appear presumptuous to attempt it. As this prophecy is largely and fully handled by many express expositors, both Jews and Christians, who apply it to the same event, with little variation, in their hypothesis, I shall refer you to them, and therefore shall be very short. It appears, from Daniel's prayer, and also from the angel's revelation and answer, that he prayed, not only for the return of his people, but likewise for the complete restoration and righteous times* described by Jeremiah and the other prophets, of which he, from their wickedness, judged there was but little prospect† at that time. These were his supplications. To this prayer the angel answers that seventy weeks were shortened, reduced, or abbreviated (for so *nechtach* signifies), that his people might finish their transgressions, make an end of sins, and reconciliation for iniquities, that so they might return to God, and bring in everlasting righteousness, for which he prayed, and seal or fulfil the prophecy, which foretold this event, and annoint the (*Kodesh Hakkodashim*) sanctum sanctorum. The angel then describes, or makes Daniel to know and understand some extraordinary events that should happen to, or befall his people during that space of time. But it does not follow that, because there were seventy weeks decreed or abbreviated before his nation should be restored, the same should take effect at that period; because this, according to all the prophecies, is made to depend on their turning to God and making themselves worthy of it. All,

* Dan. ix. 13.

† Ibid. ix. 5, 11.

therefore, which the angels intimates, is that the time given being accomplished, they were entitled to it should they be deserving of it.

There is a very great difference concerning the promises relating to the duration of the Egyptian bondage and Babylonish captivity, and to that restoration prayed for by Daniel; the first two were absolute and unconditional; but that which was to be the fulfilling of the prophecies, the restoration which Daniel prayed for, had no time fixed; therefore, what the angel reveals is, that after such a time it depended on his people's rendering themselves deserving by their reformation, which was only to be obtained by the finishing of transgression, making an end of sin, and reconciliation of iniquity, which would bring in everlasting righteousness, the completion of prophecies, and restoration of divine service, or anointing the *kodesh hakkodashim*, that is, the restoration of the Jews, an event expected both by Jews and Christians.

I shall now proceed to mark out the events which the angel declares to Daniel should happen during the limited time and divisions. The first division is that, "from the going forth of the word or prophecy (for so *dabar* signifies) to restore and build Jerusalem, unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks." Here then we have a beginning and ending of this epoch, which is, that from the word or promise made to Jeremiah of a return from captivity, in the fourth of Jehoiakim,* where the weeks begin, unto Cyrus, called by Isaiah the Lord's anointed, Messiah, or Christ,† where they end, are seven weeks, or forty-nine years. Then

* Jer. xxv. 1, 12.

† Isa. xlv. 1.

beginning from the same time, the sixty-two weeks (for they are abbreviated), that is four hundred and thirty-two years, they end or terminate in Judas Maccabeus, during which space, “the streets and walls were to be built even in troublous times;” and that it did so happen is evident from history, the people and city undergoing sundry revolutions and changes. After this epoch, that is, after the sixty-two weeks, shall Messiah (Christ or Anointed) be cut off, that is, Onias, who was the legal, anointed high priest, an upright person and of great holiness, was cruelly put to death, just after the sixty-second week.* Here, then, we find the two Christs or Messiahs; the first is Cyrus, the Prince Messiah, to whom, from the going forth of the prophecy, revealed to Jeremiah, was to be seven weeks, he having the honour of that denomination from God himself; the second Messiah is Onias, the legal high priest, and in fact anointed, or Messiah, a person of great sanctity,† and of whom it is said, that there are few persons to whom the Scriptures give greater praises,‡ who was to be killed after the sixty-two weeks, or four hundred and thirty-four years, “without help.” The words *ve-en lo* can never be made to mean, “not for himself,” it is much more proper, as they are in the margin of the English Bible “and shall have nothing;” they are very exactly rendered in the Spanish *y-no-ae-l*. To make *ve-en lo* significant, something ought to be added, and nothing so proper, as I have rendered them, or “unto him no help,” or “he had none to help him;” so that in these two Messiahs we have a most literal accomplishment of the prophecy. They were to be different, since to the first were to be seven

* 2 Macc. iv.

† Ibid. iii. 33.

‡ Dict. on the article Onias.

weeks, or forty-nine years, and the other was to be put to death, or cut off, after sixty-two weeks, or four hundred and thirty-four years.

Nothing can be more contradictory to the text, than to make the angel say (as those do who would extend the prophecy to Jesus), that there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks unto the Messiah Prince; for if the angel meant sixty-nine weeks, it must have been absurd thus to divide the time and make two reckonings, where he meant but one, contrary to all the rules of language and modes of speech. My meaning, therefore, is not only most agreeable to the text, but also conformable to chronology; besides which, Cyrus and Onias have both an inherent right of being termed or called Messiahs. But Jesus' right to that title is not so evident; for it will not be admitted as an adequate proof, what they assert, "That he was anointed with the Holy Ghost," which is a phrase, when it comes rightly to be considered, which will amount to an empty sound, without any meaning at all.

But to proceed. The next part of the prophecy is, "And the people of the Prince that shall come, shall destroy the Holy City, and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined," which is a description of the persecution and transactions of Antiochus Epiphanes and his army, who laid the city and temple waste, and like a flood overpowered everything, causing great desolation during the war.* "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week." This is the covenant made with many who left the law, to follow

* 1 Macc. i. 20-24; 30-39; 2 Macc. v. 11-16; 24-26.

the ordinances of the heathen.* “And in the midst of the week, he shall cause the sacrifices and oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations, he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation,” which happened accordingly; for he forbade in the middle of the week “burnt-offerings, and sacrifices, and drink-offerings, in the temple; and that they should profane the Sabbath and festival days.”† “Now in the fifteenth day of the month Kislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar, and builded idol altars throughout the cities of Judah on every side,”‡ so that this part of the prophecy received the literal accomplishment; and the author plainly alludes to this circumstance in his description. And that “determined shall be poured out upon the desolate.” This last part seems to want some word to make up the sentence, and may with propriety be thus made up: “And in the end the desolator shall have vengeance poured on him,” that is, in the end the Jews shall take vengeance on their enemies; which did so happen, under the conduct of the valiant Judas Maccabeus, who overthrew their forces, and recovered the city and temple, and restored the temple service, in commemoration of which deliverance, a feast was ordained, which has ever since been religiously kept.§ Thus, sir, have I expounded and explained this famous prophecy, which ends with the war and persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. The whole prophecy seems throughout a representation of the events which happened during that space, as the events themselves are a literal fulfilling of it, and in every respect agree with the history of those times. But

* 1 Macc. i. 11-15.

† Ibid. 45.

‡ Ibid. 54.

§ The annual festival of Dedication.

whatever your opinion may be of this performance, one thing I may venture to assert, and that is, that it can be no prophecy of Jesus; for to him it cannot be applied without doing the utmost violence to the prophecy, and departing from its plain meaning; and if a figurative explanation and application be admitted, I doubt not such a one may be made out as will be much disliked by Christians; and why it should not be admitted, or be on the same footing, as those which they invent, will be hard for them to show a sufficient cause.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

THE 53d chapter of Isaiah is famous amongst Christian expositors; the whole is applied to and explained of Jesus. They tell us that he is therein described and represented as a person despised and rejected, as a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief; as one on whom the sins of the whole world were to be laid; as one who should offer himself to an ignominious death, and be chastised for our transgressions and iniquities,—thereby redeeming lost mankind and working their reconciliation with an infinite and offended God,—atoning with his life and suffering for original and actual sin; the whole human race (as they pretend) being slaves of the devil, and under God's wrath and damnation, as partakers of Adam's sin;—God requiring infinite satis-

faction, which not being in the power of any finite creature to make, could only be done by Jesus as being both God and man. It is really surprising to what lengths they stretch these doctrines; asserting that no person can be saved by his own merits, making salvation attainable only by the merits of Jesus, (that is declaring we are only to be saved by proxy;) and they will have all good or beneficent works to be sinful without faith in Jesus, holding all accursed who believe they shall be saved by the law, or sect which they follow. Thus one absurdity giving rise to another, they banish that charity which on many occasions they pretend to be the distinguishing characteristic of their religion; but with what little foundation I appeal to their creeds; as these doctrines and inventions are the foundation of the present system of Christianity, and are the consequences of, and have their foundation on original sin, from whence they draw a pretence for Jesus' sufferings and ignominious death, and the necessity of infinite satisfaction, that is the necessity of one God dying to satisfy another, or the same God. It will be necessary to sift this matter and show its absurdity, and prove that there is no manner of foundation either in reason or Scripture for such invention; for as is judiciously observed, one of God's revelations cannot contradict another, because He gave us the first to judge all others by.* It will be, therefore, vain to pretend that these doctrines are above reason, if they contradict reason and common sense; that being the criterion by which all doctrines must be judged. It is very plain and evident that Adam, and the rest concerned in original sin, had sentence

* Warburton Div. Leg. Vol. i. p. 83.

pronounced on them by God himself, which sentence was inflicted on the offenders ; we have it in the following words : “ And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle and above every beast of the field ; upon thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life ; and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head and thou shall bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow shall thou bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shall thou eat of it all the days of thy life,”* &c. This was God's own definitive sentence, which being executed on the different (or several) offenders, will any one say that God required either a greater or a different satisfaction than that which He himself imposed ? Can any one say, that He was not satisfied with his own judgment ?

Go wiser thou, and in thy scale of sense
Weigh thy opinions against Providence.—*Pope.*

Can there be a greater absurdity and contradiction, than to pretend that God himself must suffer that He may pardon ? How inconsistent (not to say impious) are such doctrines ! how unacquainted must those who propagate, and inculcate such notions, be with God and his attributes !

* Gen. iii. 6-14.

Is it to be imagined that the sin of our first parents, after judgment and sentence were executed, should again be revived after some thousands of years? What tribunal or court of justice would allow this? Or who could be the appellants? Was it Adam that appealed against his Maker, or did the Almighty appeal against himself, or his sentence? Is not such a proceeding, in fact, inflicting punishment on the Deity, as if He were the aggressor for giving a merciful sentence against Adam?

Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge his justice, be the God of God.—*Pope.*

Can anything be more ridiculous? and shall we believe people, nay learned people, are serious, when they pretend to impose such absurdities for doctrines?

It is pretended that God being infinitely offended, required infinite satisfaction; but can God require of his creatures that which He never put in their power to give? Can we consistently with the natural notion we have of God, think He can act thus with his creatures, or that He in his infinite goodness can ever require more than is in our power to give? or can finite creatures give infinite offence? But for argument's sake let us suppose that such a satisfaction was necessary; and then let them tell us how it was possible that it should be made at all; for if God the son (as is pretended) be of the same essence with God the Father, how can one suffer and not the other? Besides, original sin must have equally offended the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, since they are all but one, or of one and the same essence,—for which reason all three must have required the like satisfaction; for, as they all can have but one will, none could par-

don without it; and why might not the Father or Holy Ghost be mediators as well as the Son, and if one could pardon or did not require infinite satisfaction, why not the other? And if we are told that nothing suffered by this satisfaction made on the cross but only the human nature: then they cannot make out the satisfaction which they pretend was necessary; for if human sufferings were sufficient, there was no necessity for any satisfaction to be made by Jesus, as God and man. Adam, or any of his descendants, would have done as well. But let us inquire farther, Did Jesus make full satisfaction, or did he do it only in part? If the first, pray what was it that was pardoned? Why nothing; for the debt being fully paid, or satisfaction given, there was then, of course, no pardon; for supposing you owe me a sum of money, can it be said that I pardon you anything, on receiving payment, or satisfaction to the full amount? Would it not be ridiculous for me to say, I pardon you, having received the whole? Is it not equally absurd to say, pardon was obtained, when full satisfaction was made and given? But we may be told, that though full satisfaction could not be made, yet, that God accepted it, and took it for such; if so, then must they allow, that God can pardon without full satisfaction, which, if he can, how absurd must it be to say, He required infinite satisfaction; and why He might not pardon Adam, on the punishment he inflicted, will be impossible for them to show. In short, they are reduced to this dilemma: If Jesus made full satisfaction, then was there no pardon; and if he did not make full satisfaction, then was there no necessity for either his sufferings or death. The Messiah, say they, was to die for the sins of the world; grant he did so; the natural consequence must

then be, that mankind were restored ; but nothing like this is pretended, for inquire in what the restoration consisted, and it vanishes to a mere nothing. Was the human race restored to any of its forfeited dignities ? no ; was there any alteration in their affairs ? no ; did the Jews, to whom the Messiah was promised as the greatest worldly blessing, receive any benefit or advantage by his coming ? no ; on the contrary, it is pretended, that the doing that which was necessary to be done brought on their ruin. Can there be any thing more inconsistent or contradictory, than to pretend that the salvation of the whole world could only be brought about by the ignominious death of a person, and that the very act that introduced this salvation excluded those very people, through whose means it was obtained, from the benefit of it ? How the Jews are upbraided for that very act, let all their writers witness ; one and all agree, that for this sin not only their city and temple were destroyed, but that they brought thereby damnation on themselves and posterity. There is something very unaccountable in this affair ; for Jesus must die that the world might be saved, and the Jews must be damned for the same reason. That Jesus was to suffer an ignominious death was pre-ordained, a thing settled by agreement ; to this end and purpose, it is pretended, “ he came into the world, the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ ; for of a truth against the holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatever thy hand and thy council determined before to be done.”* That

* Acts iv. 26.

this was so, is evident from what Jesus himself tells Pilate: "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."* Who can forbear lamenting this contrivance; who can forbear crying, O fatal necessity! Is it thus that the Almighty, the good, the merciful God deals his blessings to mankind, thus to deceive and doom to destruction the unhappy instruments which He was pleased to make use of in saving the world? Who could have suspected or believed that the Deity, who fills all things, should so contract his existence as to be contained in the womb of a woman,† that he should take a human shape, and appear among us in disguise, doing all he could to hide from those to whom he was sent not only his divinity, but also the character of Messiah?‡ Was it to be imagined that the Messiah would in his discourses make use of nothing but dark sayings and parables, that he might not be known? or, as he expresses himself, "that seeing they, may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted and their sins should be forgiven them?"§ Is this conduct worthy of God? is this the Messiah promised the Jews as their greatest good? Behold him using all the art he can from manifesting himself, "lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."|| Could it be

* John xix. 11.

† It is (as it were) to cancel the essential differences of things, to remove the bounds of nature, to bring heaven and earth (and what is more), both ends of a contradiction together. (Vide, Dr. South's Sermons, Vol. iii. p. 367.)

‡ Matt. xvi. 20.

§ Ibid. iv. 12.

|| Ibid. xiii. 15.

imagined, that the Messiah would hinder the Jews in obtaining the means of being healed and forgiven? “And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.”* The Jews did all in their power to be rightly informed, and only desired a sign.† But lest they should be convinced, they are refused; and a resolution is taken to give them no sign but the sign of Jonas,‡ which in fact was no sign, as it was never made good to them; for they were excluded from being present or seeing any of those transactions related of his resurrection; and I cannot help thinking, that if his death brought on the desolation of Jerusalem, and the damnation of the Jews, it was none of their fault; since the grand secret was never disclosed to those who ought to have had the information; of this Jesus himself seems to have been sensible; “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,”§ were his last and dying words; and St. Peter declares the Jews guiltless,—“And now, brethren, I wot, that through ignorance ye did it, and so did your rulers.”|| It is, therefore, a great absurdity to pretend, that the destruction of the city and temple and the dispersion of the Jews were occasioned by putting Jesus to death. Was the destruction of the kingdom of Israel (which happened *seven hundred* years before Jesus) owing to his death? was the destruction of the city and temple by the Babylonians owing to his death? were the many and frequent calamities which befell the Jews owing

* Luke viii. 10.

† Matt. xvi. 1.

‡ Ibid. 4.

§ Luke xxiii. 34.

|| Acts iii. 17.

to his death? were the frequent profanations and pollutions of the temple, and its being so often taken by different enemies, owing to his death? No; the Jews will be told, that all these calamities were brought on them by their manifold crimes; and, if so, why is not the last destruction of city and temple imputed to the same cause? The history of those times furnish such scenes of wickedness and profaneness, as are not to be equalled at any other epoch: besides, were not the Jews subject to the Romans long before the coming of Jesus? were they not barbarously oppressed and ill-treated by their extortionate governors, both before, in his time, and afterwards? was not this, together with a desire of recovering their liberties, and the being misled by some crafty and wicked leaders, that which occasioned their revolt? They might as well pretend that all the misfortunes, which befell the Jews before the coming of Jesus, were owing to his death, as to pretend, that what afterwards befell them was owing to that event; when it evidently appears, that this was brought about by so many concurrent causes. I am, &c.

LETTER XXVII.'

THE doctrine of satisfaction and the necessity of Jesus' sufferings and death, appear very plainly to have been invented by his followers; his whole conduct very evidently contradicts it. We are told that, "as Jesus sat at meat in the

house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* But go ye and learn what that meaneth, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*: for I am not come to call the righteous (says he) *but sinners to repentance.*”* Nothing can be more express than this declaration of his; but how contradictory to the present system of Christianity let any one judge. Jesus declared that they that be whole need not a physician, but only those that are sick; but Christians insist that unless both the whole and sick have one, they must be damned. Jesus freely declares that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance; but Christians insist that without *faith* they must be damned, repentance not being deemed by them sufficient. Jesus declares from Hosea† “that God will have mercy and not sacrifice;” but Christians contradict him, and strenuously insist that God could have no mercy *without* sacrifice. Is it possible that Jesus should have made such a declaration, if he knew that he himself was to be made a sacrifice,—nay a *necessary* sacrifice, to which he had, as Christians pretend, devoted and offered himself *willingly* and *freely*? But it is very plain that all pretensions of this sort have no manner of foundation; since it was with the utmost reluctance that he suffered. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, unto death,”‡ (says he;) he prayed very fervently, “O my Father! if it be possible let this cup pass from me.”§

* Matt. ix. 10, 13.

‡ Matt. xxvi. 38.

† Hosea vi. 10.

‡ Ibid. 29.

“Father, if thou be willing remove this cup from me.”* Here is what he earnestly desired, and what he besought in the utmost agonies,—such as even made the sweat that came from him “as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground.”† The whole of this transaction, therefore, evidently evinces that he had not made any such agreement; for either he knew his death to be necessary, or he was ignorant of it: if the first, then was his praying to be exempted from that which was necessary, from that to which he had devoted himself, and from that which he came to perform, absurd and ridiculous,—and would have been thought so had any common person acted in the like manner; for how could he so earnestly pray to be exempted from that which he knew was necessary for him to undergo, having freely offered himself? was the desire of saving the world a matter of such indifference to him?—was his love to mankind abated? But if he knew not that his sufferings were necessary, or that, by his means, the world was to be saved: then could he not be that divine person which Christians make him; and consequently, if infinite satisfaction was necessary, or the death of God requisite, he could not be the person that could make it; that he could not be God, is plain, not only from his whole conduct, but also from the circumstance of the angel’s descent from heaven to strengthen him.‡ Now, for God to be either in such agonies, or to stand in need of another’s assistance, appears to be such an absurdity, as surely ought not to be mentioned; for of what service or use would the divine nature be, if it could not prevent human frailties and fears from getting the better of

* Luke xxii. 42.

† Matt. xxvi. 44.

‡ Luke xxii. 43.

it, nor prevent its triumphing over it?*" On the whole, I think there redounds no honour to Jesus from the representation of this whole affair; since he prayed to be excused from it, and besought it with bloody sweats, it being done contrary to his inclination. "Not as I will," says he, "but as thou wilt,"† or, "Not my will but thine be done;"‡ so that, if he was a divine person, he must have had an opposite will to that of the Father, which, if so, it will be difficult to make it consistent; and either the Jews contracted no guilt, since there could be no salvation obtained without his sufferings; or salvation must be made the consequence of an obnoxious wicked act! To these sad dilemmas are they reduced. We are told "that the whole economy of man's redemption is everywhere represented to us as an unsearchable mystery of divine wisdom and goodness, and as the object of our belief, and not of our comprehension;§ but, as this is the foundation on which the whole superstructure is built, I think that if the same be proved to be false, everything that is built thereon must fall; for can that be made a matter of belief, which we not only do not comprehend, but is contradictory in itself? Neither can it be made to answer any end or purpose at all; for as to original sin, they do not pretend that it is atoned for, it being an article of faith that all that are born are enemies to God, and slaves of the devil, and children are doomed by the Romish Church to limbo if they die before baptism, and the reformed condemn those that are born of parents not baptized to damnation; this

* The learned Dr. South says concerning the person of Christ, that were it not to be adored as a mystery, it would be exploded as a contradiction. Sermons, Vol. iii. p. 316.

† Matt. xxvi. 39.

‡ Luke xxii. 42.

§ Uni. His. Vol. x. p. 591.

they do for original sin, of which the children are most innocent; so that Jesus' death was of no service. And as to actual sin, we are as subject to be carried away by the flesh as our forefathers were; the same inclination, the same proneness to vice predominates in our weak natures, and experience will teach us that there is not the least alteration; so that his sufferings wrought in us no cure. And, as to any spiritual benefit, it is plain that by this scheme the world is in a worse condition than it was before; for the Jews by the law of Moses, and the gentiles by that of nature, obtained salvation; but now the elect only are to be saved, and this saving doctrine is contracted to such narrow limits that it extends no farther than a particular sect; for the Roman Catholics send the reformed of all sects to the devil, and these in their turn do the like not only by them, but by all of different sects; for salvation is engrossed, and made the sole privilege of those within their own pale; and to the rest of mankind they show no mercy, as appears by their creeds. What was it, then, that his death redeemed the world from?—Was it the cause of introducing true religion? his death for that purpose was needless, and it might have been done without his suffering. But where, or among what sect or party is this true religion to be found?—Is it in the Romish Church? This the others contradict. Is it to be found in many particular sects? This will be denied by all. This now being the case, of what benefit were Jesus' sufferings and death?—Could they, in fact, show the benefit thereof, and demonstrate the cures pretended to be wrought by them: then indeed they might boast, and have some reason to apply the prophecy to him; but to pretend to impute it to him without proving the effects, is very

extraordinary. How inconsistent are Christians to their doctrines! They tell us that Jesus atoned and made satisfaction for original sin, and yet declare that children are born with it. But again they pretend that it is done away by baptism, his death benefitting those only who received it,—all others continuing under its penalty, the same as if he had not suffered; so that to be free from original sin (for which no one ever thought himself in any wise accountable) his death is not sufficient; the atonement being made to consist in baptism, or in being sprinkled with water. And after all, they place the efficacy of the cure in the imagination; for they will tell you that Jesus did his part, and by his death freed every one from this sin; but it is necessary that you think so, for otherwise you can receive no benefit from it. You must therefore first think yourself under God's curse and indignation, and then imagine Jesus has freed you from it; that is, you must imagine yourself sick, and then imagine Jesus has cured you, and then you are sound and well; but if you have not strength of imagination sufficient to make you think yourself sick, and consequently, that you stand in no need of medicine, why then, and in such case, Adam's eating the forbidden fruit will rise in judgment against you, and you must be eternally damned. Is not mankind by this redemption scheme in a much worse condition than it was before? Was this the inestimable blessing which the world received by his death. Perhaps one in a thousand will be saved, and all the rest are to be damned. Now, how he carried our sorrows and our griefs, or how he bore our iniquities and our transgressions, or how he made atonement for our sins, and in what manner he justified us are things which I confess I am not able to comprehend.

Almighty God has declared that on our repenting and turning to Him with a reformed life, He would accept and pardon us;* such acceptance on our repentance and amendment being also agreeable to reason, and to God's mercy and goodness. The case must always have been so, had Jesus suffered or not. Besides, if Jesus made satisfaction for the sins of the world, the past, present, and to come, then can it be of no importance whether we be good or bad; for if that be so, our reward or happiness must be secured thereby, without good works or virtuous actions on our part. But it may be pretended that our reward depends partly on our own merits, and partly on the satisfaction which Jesus made, —imputing part of his own righteousness to make up our own deficiency. To this I answer, By this scheme Jesus was only a saviour in part, and the redemption must then be as incomplete as it is absurd, besides that it takes from him the merits of having saved the world; for if our personal righteousness be necessary, or our repentance and amendment, then cannot his death be any advantage to us, because upon these terms, as I before observed, we ever had assurance of being accepted. Nothing can be more contradictory than to pretend that a person (and he a just one, too,) was to suffer, that the wicked might receive reward; for if that be the case men would be rewarded without regard to their merits; for personal merits must necessarily belong to the agent, and are connected with the very individual, inherent in himself, and no transfer can be made of them from one agent to another; consequently, to claim another's merits is the most absurd and incoherent scheme that ever was

* See Isaiah lv. 7, and Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

invented. Is it reasonable that a person plead another's merits, and pretend to justify himself by faith?—will this plea of justification avail the greatest villain? and shall one who practises all the moral duties of life be damned, because he lacks that faith? Can it be made consistent with either Scripture or reason (to make faith the reward of the wicked), *that the wicked be rewarded through faith*, and to impute it to them for righteousness; whilst they deny to the good, who have led a life of goodness and virtue, the reward due to their merits? If God accepts faith, let them trust to it, and let there be no distinction between moral good and evil; but if good works be deemed necessary, why shall not he who practises them be benefitted thereby, let him belong to what sect or society, either choice or chance may have placed him in? Shall the merits of one person benefit all that will plead them, and shall not personal acts and righteousness avail those who practise them? can anything be more inconsistent with God's justice and mercy? Thus you see to what absurdities the scheme of Jesus' sufferings and passion leads them. But in truth this is only an invention, and entirely fictitious; for let them suppose that the Jews had received Jesus as their Messiah; that they had believed him to be God himself, and that they had paid him, whilst living, the adoration paid to him by Christians since his death: what must have been the consequence? Must not the world have been damned? This must have been the consequence, because, no atonement, no justification, no imputed righteousness, no faith could then have been pleaded, and of consequence all must have perished everlastingly. Are they, therefore, not obliged to us for preforming the act, though wicked, as represented, since it brought them

salvation? how ungrateful are they for this benefit Jesus underwent a momentary pain, and for that they reverence and adore him; the Jews were involved in the same act, they were appointed to the work, but they brought destruction and damnation on themselves and posterity by doing their part,—and are yet despised, ill treated, and abused by those very persons who pretend to reap the benefit. These are the absurdities attending this incomprehensible scheme; they are in the right therefore, to call it “an unsearchable mystery,” and as such let those who can believe it.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVIII.

THE absurdity and inconsistency of the doctrines treated of in my two last letters prove the impossibility of applying the prophecy, or making it answer the purposes intended thereby, as some pretend, that a twofold death was implied in the sentence. They infer that Adam and his posterity were condemned both to a natural and spiritual death, from which they could only be released by the sufferings and passion of one, who was both God and man. They say an agreement being made between God the Father and God the Son, the latter offered himself to be made a sacrifice on the cross, to appease the wrath of God the Father, and to atone by this ignominious death for Adam's sin; restoring the human race thereby to God's grace and favour, freeing them

from the power of the Devil, and from the penalties under which they must have continued, as no other satisfaction could have been accepted or deemed sufficient. We shall now, therefore, inquire into the foundation of this twofold death; "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,"* which in Hebrew is expressed by the words *moth tahmuth*, very properly rendered in the margin of the English Bible, "Dying thou shalt die," which phrase denotes the certainty of its being inflicted; as will very evidently appear by considering the use and intent of the same phrase in other places. When Solomon passed sentence on Shimei, the very same phrase is made use of, "On the day thou goest forth, and passest over the Brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain thou shalt surely die," Heb. *Moth tahmuth.*†

The prophet Elisha uses the same phrase to Hazael, to denote thereby the certain death of Benhadad, king of Syria.

"The LORD hath shown me that he shall surely die." (Heb. *Moth tahmuth.*)‡ When Saul doomed his son Jonathan to death, he makes use of the same expression, "Thou shalt surely die, Jonathan." (Heb. *Moth tahmuth.*)§ He also uses the same phrases when he sentenced the priest, "Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech," Heb. *Moth tahmuth.*|| From which passages, and from all others in Scripture where the same phrase is made use of, it is plain that nothing but a corporeal death could be intended. Thus you see the foundation on which this grand superstructure is built. The sentence, therefore, only imports that on the day Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he should commence to be mortal, or be liable to death. That being the punishment, which was

* Gen. ii. 17.

† 1 Kings ii. 37.

‡ 2 Kings viii. 10.

§ 1 Sam. xiv. 44.

|| Ibid. xxii. 16.

to be inflicted, he was banished from paradise, that he might be exposed to want and calamities, that by a decay of nature and frame of body it might come on him. The punishment being thus inflicted on the aggressor, would it be just to doom his race to eternal damnation? is such a conduct reconcilable to the goodness and mercy of God? * Supposing a legislator instituted a law, and enacted a certain punishment to be inflicted on those who transgressed that law: would any other punishment be inflicted on the transgressor, besides that which had been enacted? would it not be a very great injustice to inflict a greater punishment on the offender? If this would be so in human laws and tribunals, how much more so would it be in the All-merciful God! In what a woful and miserable state must the whole human race be, if, notwithstanding, they in all respects obeyed the will of God, by which they were entitled to mercy, they should ever continue, to be under his wrath and heavy displeasure, both here and hereafter? to what purpose did He give laws, if those who practised the duties enjoined by them were not to be benefitted thereby? Can this be made consistent? No, this opinion is invented to give a colouring to what is not on any grounds *whatever* to be maintained or supported.

To support the doctrine before mentioned, it is pretended that the history of the fall ought not to be taken literally. I cannot better answer this objection than in the words made use of by the authors of the Universal History. "It cannot be denied (say they), that some of the ancient philosophers affected such an allegorical way of writing to con-

* See Univ. Hist. Vol. i. p. 125.

ceal their notions from the vulgar, and keep their learning within the bounds of their own school; yet it is apparent Moses had no such design; and as he pretends only to relate matters of fact just as they happened, without art or disguise, it cannot be supposed but that the history of the fall is to be taken in a literal sense as well as the rest of his writings."* Notwithstanding this assertion, these authors immediately declare themselves of opinion, that it was the Devil who made use of the serpent's body. That this beast stands for, and means the Devil, is also the opinion of almost every Christian commentator, and is particularly asserted by Dr. Sherlock, who has taken great pains to establish this point. But conscious that the passage as it stands, could not bear that meaning, he adds: "You'll say, What an unreasonable liberty of interpretation this is; tell us by what rules of language the seed of the woman is made to denote one particular person (that is, Jesus,) and by what art you discover the mystery of Christ's miraculous conception and birth in this common expression? Tell us, likewise, how bruising the serpent's head comes to signify destroying the power of sin, and the redemption of mankind by Christ? As the prophecy stands there" (he ought to have said, the history) "nothing appears to point out this particular meaning, much less to confine the prophecy (the history) to it."† And I think that many good reasons ought to be given to his own objections, and a proper authority produced for giving this history any other sense; since, as he himself owns, and readily allows, the expressions do not imply necessarily this sense. "We allow

* Univ. Hist. Vol. i. p. 135.

† Intent and Use of Prophecy, p. 59.

farther (says he), that there is no appearance that our first parents understood them in this sense, or that God intended they should so understand them."* Yet notwithstanding this he has, on doctrines of which our first parents knew nothing, on doctrines which "God never intended they should understand," placed and established all the hopes and comforts of religion.†

But whatever may be pretended, Adam by his fall forfeited that, whatever it was, which he for a very short interval had possessed, and was reduced to a state of labour, and subject to sorrow: yet it nowhere appears that they (he and Eve) were bereft "of a rational foundation for their future endeavours to reconcile themselves to God by a better obedience,"‡ the best foundation, and indeed the only one, on which they would place their hope (which I choose to give you in the Bishop's words); and whenever this foundation was neglected, and dependence on a Mediator introduced, you may then be sure that false religion and false worship took place; and it would be very easy to prove that it was such schemes and inventions which gave the first rise to idolatry, and defaced true religion.

But whatever hopes this learned person makes our first parents to have different from a better obedience; or whatever foundation he is pleased to make necessary for the preservation of religion, by the hopes "that their posterity should one day be restored:" this much is certain, that any such dependence must have been ill-grounded; for if Adam's posterity was to be restored by the satisfaction made by Jesus on the cross, nothing like it was effected; for the

* Intent and Use of Prophecy, p. 70, 71. † Ibid. p. 60, 61. ‡ Ibid. p. 61.

serpent still labours under the curse ; women still bear children in pain, and continue in subjection to their husbands (which some of them think the worst part of the curse); the men still labour and endure sorrow ; and death makes the same havoc now as is did before. Let them represent things in what light they please, they still continue as they were. Such inconsistencies put me in mind of what this learned bishop says, “ When unbelievers hear such reasoning, they think themselves entitled to laugh ;”* and in truth who can forbear it ? I pity any person of his learning and parts advancing inconsistencies and contradictions, rolling (as it were) with all his might a stone up a steep mountain, and then being obliged to let it fall, not able to stop it, beholding his labour lost.

To establish these doctrines they will have the serpent stand for, and be the Devil. But can anything be plainer than that every part of the sentence is only applicable to a literal serpent, a beast of the field, the being more accursed than any other beast, or above all cattle ? Rank him with the brute creation : the Devil, I think, has nothing to do in this part of the curse. The serpent was to go on his belly ; in this punishment the Devil is also excluded. He was to eat dust all the days of his life ; very improper food this is for the Devil, therefore it is not intended for him. The serpent and his seed, and the woman and her seed were to be in continual enmity ; the woman and her descendants were to bruise the serpent’s head, whilst the serpent and his seed, being by nature or by the curse made reptiles, should bite the others’ heels, that being the part which they could

* Intent and Use of Prophecy, p. 70.

most conveniently come at. This being a conflict between the woman and the serpent, and their offsprings, has the Devil any concern in this strife? Can words be made use of plainer to denote that the whole concerns the serpent and his seed, and not the Devil? and that the woman and her seed are Eve and her descendants, and not Jesus in particular, as is pretended? that in this enmity or strife each should hurt the other as they had it in their power? Could the Devil hurt or bite Jesus, or has he any seed or posterity at all? It is plain, therefore, that the curse concerns the serpent only; he is represented at the very first mention, as a cunning creature: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made;"* and for making a bad use of his subtlety he was punished. Now had the serpent been actuated by the Devil, he could deserve no punishment. In short, there is nothing in the sentence which concerns the Devil. Neither can I find in this whole history, any promise of a Messiah, nor any agreement between God the Father and God the Son. Indeed such an agreement must be inconsistent, and would prove different wills in the Godhead; that is, there must have been one willing to make satisfaction, and another willing to receive it, whilst a third remained passive or neuter; acts as contrary to each other as any distinct beings are capable of, and inconsistent in the same God.

Thus you see the impossibility of proving what they pretend to, from the first eight verses of this chapter, and how contradictory it is in every respect. The remainder will appear not less so. Verse 9th. "And he made his grave

* Gen. iii. 2.

with the wicked and with the rich in his death ;” this happened the very reverse ; for he died with the wicked, being crucified between two thieves, and was buried in the tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, who is represented as an honourable, just man, and a councillor.

Verse 10. “ He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” Here are three blessings, of which none can be applicable to him (Jesus). The first is, that he should see his seed or descendants ; but children we do not hear that he had any. The second is length of days, or long life ; this he had not, for he was cut off in the thirty-third year of his age. Thirdly, prosperity, of which he had none, as appears from the account of his life and sufferings. To make out these blessings, they have recourse to the mystical application, though they pretend this whole chapter to be literal of him ; they say that *seed* here does not mean *children* or descendants, but that the phrase denotes the *church*, or his followers, spiritually so called. But this has not the least foundation, the word *Zerang* being used always to denote descendants or posterity, and there is no such thing in all Scripture as spiritual seed or spiritual descendants. In the same manner they explain his length of days, and pretend, it means immortality. But this is trifling ; since immortality could not be given as a privilege, but is general and common to every soul, the privilege even of the wicked and the damned ; so that length of days in the next world could be no peculiar blessing, since immortality takes place there. Length of days, therefore, could only be an earthly blessing, As to “ the pleasure of the LORD prospering in his hands,” or prosperity here—as they cannot make it out *here*, they

send us to his heavenly kingdom ; but as they know nothing at all of it, you must therefore take it from their guesses.

Verse 11. "By this knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." This I have shown very plainly he did not ; therefore I shall say nothing more on this head.

Verse 12. "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong." This part of the verse is in no ways applicable to him ; for, far from dividing a portion with the great, or having any spoil allotted him, he never possessed anything of his own ; of this he complains himself. "Because he poured out his soul unto death," this being contrary to his will, and forced on him, he could not pretend to any merit from it. How "he bore the sin of many," or "made intercession for transgressors," I have already considered.

Thus, sir, from the objections and considerations aforesaid, it is evident that they cannot apply this chapter to Jesus, neither can they prove the benefit which they pretend must be the necessary consequence of their doctrine. It now remains that I give a different application. The generality of Jewish commentators explain this prophecy, and apply it to the whole body of the Jews. They tell us that Isaiah, in his 51st chapter, speaks great matters concerning the redemption of Israel, and denounces God's wrath and indignation against the oppressors and afflictors of his people. In the next, or 52d chapter, the prophet continues the same subject, and this he does in the most endearing terms that can be expressed ; and under the denomination of a servant,* exalts and extols Israel above all

* This term is not used to describe a state of servitude, but a servant of God is the highest character.—Note of the copier.

nations,—this term best describing the low and despicable state to which that people should be reduced, and what it should be made to suffer; but from which it should be delivered. They prove that the whole body of the Jews are often mentioned under this epithet, and in particular that Isaiah calls them by this name. “Yet now hear, O Jacob, my servant.” “Fear not, O Jacob, my servant.” “Thou art my servant, O Israel.” (See Isaiah xl. 1, 2, and xlix. 3.) And in the passage now under consideration: “Behold my servant shall deal prudently,” he shall be “exalted and extolled, and be very high.” (Verse 14.) At this exaltation the world will be astonished; and the more so, because like a servant he was oppressed and despised, and that in such sort as hardly to appear like other sons of men. At this change (verse 15th), even kings or great men should be astonished, and shut their mouths; for, in this unexpected exaltation, they should see that which had not been told them, and consider that which they had not heard. The admiration which this event should occasion is continued by the prophet, and he breaks out, chapter 53, verse 1, with, “Who could believe our report, or that the power of the LORD should be manifested as revealed to this despicable people,” or that (verse 2), “a tender plant should sprout from a root out of dry ground, which had neither form nor comeliness to make it desirable? (Verse 3.) Being such as was always despised and rejected and made to undergo much sorrows and grief; hiding our faces from him, as not worthy of esteem; for (verse 4), it was always thought that he was stricken, and smitten of God; and for that reason made to undergo much sorrow and grief; for (verse 5) we continually wounded him with our transgressions, and bruised

him with our iniquitous proceedings against him, the weight of which we made him feel; and laid on him the chastisement of our peace, *i. e.*, persecuting him in times of peace and leisure, sporting with his sufferings; thinking that by his stripes we should atone for our sins,* (as is the case actually in Portugal and Spain, where it is believed that the merit of persecuting the Jews atones for all crimes.) But (verse 6) in so doing we strayed like sheep (say the *gentiles*), and turned every one to his own way, God permitting us to do that to him which we deserved ourselves; (verse 8) though he was taken from prison and from judgment, and made to undergo torments and death, in the midst of his best days,—all which is brought on him for the transgression of my people; (verse 9) making his grave with the wicked, or like the worst of malefactors (for he is denied even burial, as thinking him unworthy of it): notwithstanding this, his death was honourable, as he was not brought to it for either violence or deceit; (verse 10) but merely because it pleased the LORD to afflict him and punish his soul for his sin.” His sufferings and afflictions have now an end in his exaltation and restoration; for “he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. (Verse 11.) He shall see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;” for he shall bear or clear them of their iniquities, teaching them the ways of the LORD, and making them acceptable; for many will join themselves to the Jews, as is declared, “Also

* At the time these letters were written the Inquisition was still in full force in Spain and Portugal.—Ed. Oc.

the sons of the strangers that join themselves to the LORD to be his servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold on my covenant: even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people; so saith the LORD God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel; yet will I gather others unto him." (Isaiah lvi. 6-8.) "For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land; and the stranger shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob." (Isaiah xiv. 1.) "Therefore," continues the prophet, (liii. 12,) will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;" and that for the merits of "having poured out his soul unto death," in witness of God's holy NAME, for which "he was numbered with the transgressors," patiently bearing the sinful and unrighteous behaviour of many, and now in his exaltation interceding for (these) transgressors.

Thus, sir, have I given you a sort of paraphrase on this famous chapter of Isaiah. To me this appears to be the true and genuine sense; and I am confirmed in my opinion, both from the subject of the preceding chapters, and from that which follows, containing a description of the deliverance to be wrought, which the prophet concludes with the following remarkable words: "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest and not comforted, behold I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundation with sapphires; and I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates with carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones, And all

thy children shall be taught of the LORD, and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established; thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee. Behold they shall surely be gathered together, but not by me; whosoever shall gather together against thee, shall fall for thy sake. Behold I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD." (Isaiah liv. 11, &c.) There are those who apply this prophecy of Isaiah liii. throughout to King Josiah; but there are many things, in my opinion, which do not answer to his character. The great Grotius I think with better success, applies it to the prophet Jeremiah; there are many things in his life and persecutions which make the application to fit him more probably; though I choose to give you the explanation which is more generally followed. But, let the prophecy concern the Jews in general, let it concern Jeremiah or Josiah, this much is evident,—it cannot be applied to Jesus; and of this opinion must the New Testament writers have been, or they would have quoted and made application of it. I am, &c.

APPENDIX.

GENESIS XLIX. 10.

REMARKS ON LETTER XXII.

2d Prop. It is asserted "That it was to hold the sceptre or pre-eminence above the other tribes." I conceive that the *shebet* nowhere stands for pre-eminence, but, as I have elsewhere observed, when it is applied to government, always signifies absolute independence. The pre-eminence above the other tribes is expressed in the same prophecy in other terms, namely, *Judah*, thou shalt be he whom thy brethren praise, or rather (as *yoducha* implies), shall confess and acknowledge as the *superior*. 3d Prop. It is supposed in this letter, "that the *mechokek* (מְחֻקֵּק) means the legislative power within itself, independent of or separate from the other tribes." This I take to be far from the meaning here intended. For as the first, viz : legislative power, or supreme legislation, there could be no such power in the Jewish commonwealth; such a power supposes a right of enacting, abrogating, and new-modelling, or altering former ones. This is absolutely contrary to the Theocratic government of that commonwealth. The power lodged in the supreme magistracy among the Israelites was only the explanation and execution of the Divine laws, such a power as the king and council have in Great Britain, relative to the

present constitution, which power is included in the *shebet* or sovereignty annexed to the regal one. I have explained the *mechokek* in my letter. 2nd. In regard to the tribe of Judah having a distinct government within itself, I conceive that this was not peculiar to that tribe; I imagine every tribe was alike independent before the royalty was established; every tribe constituted a separate state by itself, independent and sovereign, save only in matters of general concern, in which case all the tribes (or their deputies) assembled, as was done in extraordinary cases; then indeed there was, if I may so speak, a determination of the states-general, which every tribe was obliged to obey, as well Judah as the other tribes. But in what concerned each particular tribe, as such, each was independent. 4th Prop. That this was to continue till the coming of Shiloh, who was to unite the people. I have no concordance to ascertain what I am now to assert, but am pretty clear that I am right, viz.: that whenever the people or house of Israel are intended in the law, they are always mentioned by *'am* in the singular; and that when *'ammim* is used, it is always expressive of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. If this be so, as I think it is, then this gathering or rather obedience, must refer to the nations in general, as well as the Jews, and not to the establishing the royalty in the House of David.

What I have here to offer, is in substance but a copy of a letter, which I wrote some years ago, to a clergyman of the Church of England, on some part of the 49th chapter of Genesis, in which I have endeavoured to show, that as the translation of the 10th verse of this chapter now stands in the English Bible, it implies a contradiction, and that the use to

which it is applied, of determining the time for the advent of the Messiah to be already past, has no foundation in the text. But on the contrary, if truly translated, it will afford a very strong presumption that he cannot be yet come; this will be plain to any one that considers the consequences, which will be the result of the subsequent arguments, which must speak for themselves, and for which I shall make no apology here, but proceed to the consideration of the subject.

And here I must first beg leave to observe in general, that to explain a prediction (and the more so if obscure, or where the terms in which it is couched, be capable of different meanings,) before the completion, is attended with much more difficulty, than to reduce a fact once supposed, to such prediction. This being premised, it cannot be expected that I should pretend to anything farther than a probable solution of the text, without pretending to certainty. What I shall first attempt here, will be to show, that as this text is rendered in the English version, it may be reduced to a contradiction. But before I proceed farther, it will be necessary to fix the meaning of the word *shebet*, especially, as I shall use the same term used in that translation, but in its genuine sense, which I shall prove to be independent sovereignty, whereas in the application of the word *shebet*, it is made to signify anything but that. *Shebet* then admits three distinct meanings. The first, and perhaps original sense, is sceptre, the second, tribe, and the third, a rod.* The first is the sovereign power, whether lodged in the hands of one or many. The second is any collective body of people,

* Also a walking staff, and a pen or pencil. Ps. xxiii. 4, & Judg. v. 14.

supposed to proceed from one head. The third is a rod and frequently means that of correction, and is applied either to an immediate punishment inflicted by Almighty God, or to that of the civil magistrate in punishing offenders, or lastly, to the private correction in particular families. Now whenever this word is used in Scripture, it retains that sense distinctly to whichsoever it belongs. To instance in the present text which runs thus: שבט יסור לא, &c., when if the word *shebet* be taken in the second sense, it ought to be thus translated: "Judah shall not cease being a tribe," &c., which though the only way it can be rendered if *shebet* should here mean tribe, yet I think it would be very indifferent grammar to be thus translated; however, as a prediction, it would be still true, for Judah has not ceased being a tribe, though it were an enslaved one. But this I am satisfied cannot be the meaning of the text; and if we take the *shebet* to mean a rod, the translation would run: "The rod shall not depart from Judah," &c. This would be also true, since that tribe, as well as the others, has not been often free from a variety of calamities; this, however, does not appear to be the meaning of the text, the *shebet* here being the promise of a blessing, not a curse. I shall now consider the *shebet*, as applied to royalty, and let the Scriptures determine the meaning. Now, if in every place wherein it is used in Scripture for royalty, it be confined in its sense to an independent sovereignty, then it will be but reasonable to suppose that it signifies the same thing here; and that it does signify such an independent sovereignty only, will easily appear to any one that will be at the pains of examining the subsequent text.

"There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a (*shebet*)

sceptre shall rise out of Israel.”* This is applied to the Messiah by both Jews and Christians. I therefore take it for granted, it will be allowed in this place to mean an independent sovereignty. “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; the (*shebet*) sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.”† As this is applied to Almighty God, I presume no one will dispute its being an independent sovereignty.

“The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the (*shebet*) sceptre of the rulers.”‡ Here, the destruction of the Babylonian monarchy is predicted by the sceptre of the rulers being broken, or in other terms, the loss of their independence. “And she had strong rods for the sceptre (*shebet*) of them that bare rule, &c., so that she hath no strong rods to be a (*shebet*) sceptre to rule, &c.”§ By holding the sceptre (*shebet*) in the former text is shown Israel’s independence, and the loss of it in the latter a contrary mark. “I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the (*shebet*) sceptre from the house of Eden.”|| “And I will cast off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the (*shebet*) sceptre from Ashkelon, &c.”¶ The cutting off him that swayeth the sceptre here, is the mark of their loss of independence; and the departure of the sceptre from Egypt implies the same thing. “And the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the (*shebet*) sceptre of Egypt shall depart away.”** These are the only places in the Scriptures that have come to my knowledge, where the *shebet* is applied to royalty, and in every one it signifies an absolute

* Num. xxiv. 17. † Ps. xlv. 6. ‡ Isa. xiv. 5. § Ezek. ix. 11–14.

|| Amos i. 5.

¶ Ibid. 8.

** Zech. x. 11.

independent sovereignty. It is, then, but reasonable to conclude that the *shebet*, in the text before us, signifies the same independent sovereignty, and not that vague indeterminate sense of any subordinate government, to which it is here applied by those who would make this text subservient to their system. Having thus fixed the sense of the *shebet* by the Scriptures when that word is applied to government, the next thing I propose is to show the inconsistency of the English version with itself, granting the *shebet* to signify what I have above shown it to mean. And here it will be necessary to transcribe the text, the better to keep it in view; English version thus, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." From which it would be natural to conclude that the sovereignty should devolve upon Judah, and with it a continual legislative power, which should uninterruptedly so continue, until Shiloh, or the Messiah come, and on his coming there should be an ingathering of the people to him. This, I believe, is no more than may be fairly taken for the sense of the text, as there rendered. Now, if this be the sense of it, as I think it appears to be, what shall we say, if from the Scriptural account, which we have of that tribe, (viz., Judah,) it was never completed? And to be convinced that it really never was so, no more is necessary than to examine the history of that tribe, which will make it very clear. To begin, then, we are told in the Scriptures that from the time of Joshua until there was a royal establishment in the family of Saul, the Israelites were in a state of anarchy, without any regular government, every one doing what to him seemed best, save only when God appointed ex-

traordinary Judges, *pro tempore*, for some particular deliverance; at all other times no traces of a regular commonwealth appear. Then God, at their earnest desire, gave the people Saul for their king: the royalty in his family soon had its period. By the same divine appointment, David succeeded in the government, which, after his death, devolved on Solomon, and in him ended the sovereign power in Judah over all Israel; for henceforward the sovereignty of Judah was confined within itself and the tribe of Benjamin. This also was comparatively but of short duration, and had its period in the person of Zedekiah, with whom ended the sovereignty of Judah; and this, according to the English translation, ought to have been the time of the advent of the Messiah. But nothing like that appeared, unless Nebuchadnezzar be set up for that GREAT PRINCE.

I shall here pass by what might be said on that head, and just take notice of another thing necessary by that translation, which is, that the Lawgiver, or the legislative power, ought to be a prerogative of that tribe; whereas it is to be observed that neither the kings of Judah, nor the priests, nor the extraordinary judges, nor the whole people joined to them, ever pretended to such power,—a power utterly inconsistent with the Mosaic constitution;—for all the laws, moral, political, and ceremonial, were immediately enacted by God himself in sight of the people, as at the giving of the law (ten commandments), or mediately by the hands of Moses, as the greater part of the law; wherefore it would have been an affront to the Divine Legislator, and the highest presumption in any prince of that people, to assume the power of making laws, without special directions from the same Almighty Author of the laws of Israel; and in

such case it would be only the promulgation of a Divine law, and not a legislative power in the prince. The Israelitish government being a proper theocratic government, the holders of the sovereign power therein were only executors of the law, and not, as in other states, legislators. To go on here would carry me beyond my design, having just touched on this by the by : so I will return to the history of the tribe of Judah.

When the kingdom of Judah was totally destroyed, and the commonwealth dissolved by Nebuchadnezzar, then did the sceptre depart from Judah, and is accordingly taken notice of by Ezekiel, in that sense, in the passage I before cited, xix. 14. This is the departure of the sceptre in the most limited sense the text can be taken in; for there seems some reason to suppose that Judah's sovereignty should extend over all Israel, as well as be independent himself, from the tenor of this prophecy, which represents his brethren as his dependents; and if this was really the case, the sceptre departed long before this, as far back as the revolt of the ten tribes. However, be that as it will, at this time the sceptre departed from Judah to all intents and purposes; Judah, as well as Israel, being enslaved, and their government being entirely dissolved by the Chaldeans, and themselves made captive, and carried to Chaldea and elsewhere,—their country being all laid waste, their cities burnt, their commonwealth, their laws, religion, and liberty, at an end. Now, if this be not a departure of the sceptre, if this be not the loss of sovereignty, it may be as well affirmed that, when Alexander became master of the empire of Persia, after the death of Darius, and the captivity of his family, and destruction of his capital, and after laying all

waste before him,—I say after Alexander's having performed all this, it may, with as much reason, be affirmed that the sovereignty, or sceptre, had not departed from Persia; and, indeed, with much better reason; for Alexander himself adopted the Persian manners, and, as far as he was able, became a Persian; but the Jews, on the other hand, in Chaldea, forgot their own language, and in a degree became naturalized to the country and customs of their masters. Notwithstanding that the conquered Persians nearly subdued their masters, by their falling in with the Persian manners, yet it is true the Scriptures fix the dissolution of the Persian empire. The same reasoning will hold good with regard to all the revolutions which have happened in the world; for if the entire conquest of the kingdom, and the transmigration of the people, be not the departure of the sceptre, or which is the same thing, loss of independence, then may Constantinople be said to be the metropolis of the Greco-Roman, and not of the Turkish empire; but this is too obvious to be farther insisted upon. I have yet to obviate one objection which is alleged against what I have here advanced, it is this: It is said the departure of the sceptre at this time was of too short duration to be taken notice of in the text. To this it may be answered, that seventy years' captivity, or the loss of independence for that space, is absolutely a chain in time, where it was to be one continued series of time; that, as the loss of one link in a chain destroys that connexion necessary to its being one chain: so here this chain in time, of seventy years, as much destroys that uninterrupted continuation of the sceptre's residence in Judah, and as much denies the truth of the prophecy which expresses an absolute non-departure of the

sceptre, as if the captivity had continued seven centuries. The question not being how long the sceptre might be gone, but whether it was to depart at all.

In the 39th chapter of Ezekiel, the desolation of Egypt is foretold in the strongest terms, when at the same time, it is expressly declared, that that captivity should be for only forty years, when a restoration was to take place; which is enough to satisfy us that the term of duration of the loss of independence does not affect the point in question, *the departure of the sceptre*. But supposing for once, that seventy years' captivity was too short a space to be taken notice of in this prophecy, the restoration under the Persian monarchy does in no wise answer the intent of the sceptre, or sovereignty of the text, which I think I have already proved to be an independent sovereignty. So this confession would be of no real use to our adversaries; because that restoration of the Jews was still subordinate to the Persian government, and may be considered only as a colony, sent to resettle a waste country. This colony of Jews were sent by the Persian government to repeople the country which had formerly belonged to their ancestors, and which they were now to hold under the protection and suffrage of the kings of Persia.

Their governor, though a Jew, held the government by patent from the king of Persia, over the new province of Judea, with some particular privileges to the Jews, but still considering them as his subjects; and although the king of Persia favoured the Jews with a governor of their own nation, yet the tribe to whom the governor appertained was not at all considered. After the time of Cyrus, the privileges of the Jews were very precarious, and not confirmed till after

sundry embassies to and from the Persian court, as appears from the Book of Ezra and Nehemiah. It seems the lieutenants of Syria looked upon Judea as a province included in their commission, which they did not care to part with, till express orders came from the Persian court for that purpose, This must give us a very mean notion of the sceptre, if it were one. This I am sure of, that it is nothing like an independent one, such as Jacob speaks of, and which by way of eminence he calls *shebet*. When the Persian empire was swallowed up by the Grecians, Judea, as a province of Persia, fell under new masters, even before the entire reduction of Persia, Alexander taking this in his way; and it now became a province of the Grecian empire. This was nearly the situation that Judea continued in, until Antiochus, by his oppression, cruelty, and irreligion, rendered it necessary for the Jews to recover their liberty, or entirely abandon their religion, and embrace idolatry; under such circumstances to revolt and set up for themselves, became absolutely necessary. Then, indeed, and not before, did the Jews become once more independent, under their leaders of the Maccabean family, who were, however, not of the tribe of Judah, but of Levi; so that now the sovereignty was transferred from the tribe of Judah to that of Levi; nay, the whole form of government was quite altered, and in many respects different from what it was during the government of the royal family of David. In his family, the kings were so by divine right, in the strictest sense; but here, it was partly by military force, from generals becoming kings, through favour of the soldiery, and partly by the choice of the people, who, finding themselves in desperate circumstances, were glad to see some able person at their head, and

readily received that family for sovereigns, judging that those who had so well defended them, were most capable to govern them: add to this, that as this family were priests, they might have had very considerable interest with the people, previous to the troubles that brought about this revolution.

Still this is certain, let the Maccabean family have acquired the royalty by whatsoever means, or the government been what you please, from the time that the royalty was abolished in the house of David, in the person of Zedekiah, till this time, Judah was, as I before observed, but a province at best, which will establish the vacancy in the sovereignty of Judah for several seventy years. During this last form of government, under the Maccabean family, Judea was subdued by the Romans, and made a province of that empire; for notwithstanding the Romans allowed the princes of the Maccabean family the title of kings, it was, however, a bare empty title; it being well known that the conquered princes under the Roman empire were often cited to appear at Rome for trial, and sometimes at the suit of their own subjects. The kings of Judea were upon the same footing. Moreover, the Romans struck at the very root of the Jewish constitution, when they appointed Herod king of Judea; for by the constitution no alien could be king, and Herod, as an alien, could not legally be their king; yet by the power of the Romans he enjoyed that dignity to his death. This shows the servile condition to which Judea was then reduced.

Having thus run through, as briefly as I could, the history of the tribe of Judah, which compared with Jacob's prophecy, as it stands translated, I cannot see what connexion there is between them, nor in what manner it has

been completed, granting the *shebet* to imply an independent royalty, which I have already shown to be the sense of it, it will reduce us either to give up the text itself as untrue, or that translation which reduces it to a contradiction. The latter, I presume, ought to be given up, not the former.

This will lead us to consider whether a translation may not be given that will free us from the before-mentioned contradictions, and admit a reasonable solution. This is what I shall now attempt, and explain myself thereon.

The text, then, I imagine, ought to be rendered thus: "The sovereignty shall not depart from Judah, nor the scribe from between his feet for ever, when Shiloh cometh; and to him shall the nations render obedience," or, if you please, "to him shall be the ingathering of the nations." Any objections which might be made against the term "sovereignty," which I here use as the most intelligible, is, I believe, already obviated. I have ventured to use another term for the *mechokek* also, by rendering it a "scribe or secretary," instead of lawgiver, which I have already shown to be incompatible with the theocratic constitution of the Jewish government. Although it must be granted, there will not be altogether the same reason against the legislative power being vested in the person of the Messiah, as there was against its being vested in the nation under their former kings; as the power vested in the Messiah will be much more extensive, as well as more unlimited, than any other prince's whatsoever—a Prince on whom will rest the Spirit of God in a very eminent manner: yet I am, notwithstanding, of opinion that no more is here meant by the (מִחְקֵק) *mechokek* than a secretary in common with all other states. The radix, from which *mechokek* is derived, I take

to be a word that signifies "to engrave;" hence the word *Chok* (קח), "statute," from statutes, &c., being engraved. In Scripture, *mechokek* is used for lawgiver, as Num. xxi. 19, there applied to Moses; the same, Deut. xxxiii. 21; in Judges v. 9, 14, it is rendered rulers, it there may, I think, also signify scribes. In Ezek. viii. 10, it is used for portraying. The next term, which I rendered differently from the English version, and whereon is laid much weight is the word *עד*. Here, I do not pretend that it is always made use of in the sense I shall give it in this place; all I aim at is only to prove that the word will admit that meaning; for it is evident enough that *עד* generally signifies "until." But then this rule must always hold good, that whenever any equivocal term is used, which is capable of more than one sense, that only ought to be understood which best explains the author that makes use of it, and is most consonant in the sense it gives to that particular passage, to the whole tenor of the author's writings, and to the system of which it is a part; and that meaning which would reduce the author to contradict himself ought to be rejected. This, I think, is but fair dealing. This being granted, then, it will be certain that *עד*, in this place, ought not to be understood "until," if capable of being rendered "for ever, or evermore;" and as it will be proved capable of meaning the latter, and that the latter will also render the author consistent with himself, and the system of which his writings are a part, so it is but reasonable to understand the word here in this latter sense. It is now necessary to show that *עד* often does signify for ever; that it does so will evidently appear from the subsequent texts, where *עד* is used by itself, or absolutely in that sense. Thus, Num. xxiv. 20, 24, *עד*

אבר, "is to perish for ever and ever," and in Job. xx. 4, הוֹזֵאת, "Hast thou known this from everlasting?" also, Psalms xcii. 8, עַד עַד לְהַשְׁמֵרם, "For to cause them to perish for evermore;" Psalms cxxxii. 12, גַּם בְּנֵיהֶם עַד עַד, "Also their children for evermore;" Psalms cxxxii. 14, וְזֹאת מְנוּחַתִּי עַד עַד, "And this is my rest for ever and ever." So, in Isa. ix. 5, אָבִי עַד, "Everlasting Father, or father of the age"; Isa. xxvi. 4, בְּטַח בְּיְיָ עַד עַד, "Trust in the LORD for ever and ever;" Isa. xlv. 17, וְלֹא תִכְלָמוּ עַד עוֹלָמִי עַד, "Nor shall ye be confounded for ever and ever;" Isa. xlvii. 15, שֶׁכֵּן עַד וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ, "He that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy;" Isa. lxv. 18, כִּי אִם שִׂישׁוּ וְגִילוּ עַד עַד, "But rejoice and be glad for ever and ever;" and in Hab. וַיִּתְפָּצְצוּ עַד הַרְרֵי, "And the everlasting hills were scattered." Besides the texts above cited, the words לְעַד and וְעַד occur in the Scriptures, in above thirty places, to signify duration, which I think is sufficient to convince any one that עַד will admit the sense I have here given it. Now, if so understood in this place, then it will follow that the particle כִּי ought also to be rendered *when*, as it is always regulated in construction according to the sense of the preceding and subsequent parts of a sentence, and is rendered "that, when, because," &c., as is well known to any one that has but a moderate knowledge of Hebrew. The word יְקָהָת occurring only once more in Scriptures, and that in Prov. xxx. 17, where it is necessarily rendered "obedience," makes it very probable that it has the same meaning here; especially as the Messiah will have a universal sovereignty, and be truly God's vicegerent on earth, it will be reasonable to suppose that universal obedience will be paid him; and if any other passage in Scripture hint an ingathering of the nations, it

cannot be taken but in a very remote sense. Having thus considered the words of the text grammatically, it now remains to see whether the text, in this light, does not appear more natural, and more consonant with the other parts of the Scripture than the translation rejected. To have a clearer view of which, it will be necessary to observe that the blessing given to Judah seems to consist of three parts.

The first, beginning at the 8th verse, proposes some special privileges to be enjoyed by that tribe, as such, viz: to be revered by the other tribes, to be powerful; hence Judah is compared to a lion; he was also to be successful against his enemies, implied in that phrase, *thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies*. Each of these prerogatives was actually conferred on that tribe; Judah had the first place in the camp; was superior in number to the other tribes, and after the death of Joshua was appointed leader in the conquest of Canaan. The second part contains this notable prediction: that when Shiloh or the Messiah should come, the sovereignty should be vested in Judah, in the person of the Messiah himself, and should never depart from it, nor should the scribe or secretary ever fail attending the royalty, and that the nation should be obedient to his government.

At what precise time this great event should take place, is not there said, only that it shall certainly come to pass. Agreeable to this is that of Isaiah: "There shall come a Redeemer unto Zion," &c., lix. 20; but he is much more expressive and clear in the 11th chapter of his book; there he describes the Messiah as yet to come, and is negatively precise in regard to the time,—that is, that it should not be till after the second captivity. In respect to the person of

the Messiah, he is also clear as to his tribe and family, which was to be of the tribe of Judah, and family of David (Jesse). He also speaks with precision in regard to his character, affirming that he should be invested with the power and sovereignty from on high; that he should be vested with righteousness, mildness,—indeed, with every virtue in the greatest perfection; that he should administer justice from an intuitive knowledge; that the nations should cheerfully obey him, and that they should earnestly repair to his standard. He was also to unite the house of Israel and Judah, and heal that breach which has so long subsisted between them. Finally, that he should restore universal peace on earth, and universal righteousness was to obtain throughout the world. As these singular blessings were to be the effects of this great prince's administration, so were all mankind to be partakers of pure wisdom; and the whole earth (as the prophet expresses it) was to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Much to the same purpose is Jeremiah, wherein (chap. xxxiii. 4, to the end) the restoration of the House of Judah and Israel it promised under the צֶמַח “branch” of David, and which, I think, cannot so much as be pretended to have been literally accomplished. This *branch* he then describes as a most upright and perfect prince. These prophecies are all delivered in a very pompous and sublime style, and in the most emphatic terms, suitable to the dignity of the subject. Ezekiel, who wrote later, in the 37th chapter of his book, from v. 21 to the end, gives us a more particular description of the union of the Houses of Judah and Israel, together with the promise of their final restoration under the Messiah, than either of the before-mentioned prophets, and with this circumstance, that when this predic-

tion took effect, then they should be no more divided or dispersed; but that the government should be established and firm under their prince, Messiah,—in this respect corresponding with Jacob's prophecy, that when Shiloh came, the sovereignty should evermore continue in Judah, and agreeable to the other part of the same prophecy, that the people should render him obedience. As the Messiah was to be a just and perfect prince, the prince of peace, being a subject under such government is the greatest happiness, which is nearly the same that Ezekiel says should happen at the restoration of universal peace and equity upon earth, and which is the consequence of a cheerful obedience to a just government.

Thus far, then, Jacob, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel agree. Another thing alluded to in this prophecy, is extent of dominion; David repeats the same thing, Psal. lxxvii. 17, both regarding the same person; indeed, the whole is so often included in Scriptures by the greatest part of the prophets, that it becomes unnecessary to produce more authorities where the thing is so evident.

The third part of this prophecy has a more special relation to the fertility of the inheritance of the tribe of Judah; part of this has been accomplished; but it is to receive its full completion in the latter and final restoration under the Messiah, which is also a circumstance not omitted by the later prophets, though the latter seem to regard the whole of the land of promise, and Amos in particular. I shall therefore transcribe chap. ix. 13, &c., "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the trader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall

melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their own land, and they shall no more be pulled out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God." This is so very plain, that it requires no comment to show the resemblance it bears to Jacob's prophecy. Thus we see the English version in this particular cannot be true; because it makes the text inconsistent with the tenor of the whole Scriptures, so far as it has any concern with any part of it; and from what has been said, it affords a strong presumption that the Messiah is not yet come; because when he comes the sceptre is not to depart from Judah; but the sceptre not being now in Judah, it follows the Messiah has not yet come.

And the prophets say, when the Messiah comes, things are to assume a new face; and peace and righteousness are universally to obtain among mankind; but as peace, &c., does not obtain universally, it follows, &c. Farther, the prophets say, the Messiah is to restore Israel, and their country is to be repeopled by them; but Israel is not restored, &c., therefore the Messiah has not yet appeared, &c. The prophets say, the whole house of Israel is to be miraculously gathered from all their dispersions; but as they are yet dispersed, therefore the Messiah, &c.

P. S. Throughout the foregoing piece, I have considered the text as it stands pointed in our Bible; but it is now well known, and has been fully proved, that the points are but a modern invention, and it is not improbable that the word

עך might be originally read as if pointed with *cholem* ; this would alter the sense, and instead of “for ever,” it would be עך 'od, “anymore, or again ;” which would imply that the sceptre having departed once or oftener, it should, when Shiloh came, depart no more, but remain fixed in the tribe of Judah ; this would be still plainer than supposing it עך 'ad, for ever.

It is observable, the word עך “anymore” is written once or twice* in Genesis without the ו, עך, whereas I think it is written nowhere else so

MR. DIAS ON THE SECOND PSALM.

The following is in answer to a paragraph of a letter relating to my translation of the 2d Psalm :

In regard to my translation of the 2d Psalm, I have no concordance ; so I cannot examine if the word *bar* is made use of for *son* in any other part of the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament or not. But I think (and I believe I am not mistaken) that Mr. Nieto, who ought to understand the language, translates it as I do ; and if I am not greatly mistaken, I followed him therein. But, be that as it may,

* This occurs in Gen. iii. 22, and xix. 12 ; the Massorah notes other passages, as Job ii. 9, and several others not now remembered.—ED. OC.

the translating the word *bar* in that place *son* gives no manner of advantage to the cause of Christianity; as I think the whole psalm refers to King David. But if it had really any reference to the Messiah, what then? Does the word *son* make a divinity? Are not all the house of Israel called sons of God,—*Banim attem ladonai elohechem?* (Deut. xiv. 1;) and, in the second verse, *Ki am kadosh attah:* “For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God?” I know *Rashi* renders it, “Gird yourselves with purity.” But if a text that the Christians think a great prop to their cause (though, in truth, none at all) should be altered, would it not look as if they had some foundation, if for that reason another meaning were introduced, and a reason required for so doing? I have not now time to enter into a farther disquisition of this matter; another occasion may offer, when I may give you my sentiments more at large on this text. But, in the mean time, take this along with it, that, let whoever be meant, it is in no wise adapted to Jesus, without he had really proved himself the Son of God, in a manner more particular than any other of the sons of Israel,—which he has not done, any more than he has proved himself the Messiah. The arguments in the foregoing sheet, prove how little claim he or any other has yet had to that high character.

January 19.—In my letter of this date (the foregoing,) I told you I had no concordance, and therefore could not say whether the word *bar* in the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament was anywhere used for *son*. I had thought for some time that I had seen it used in that sense, but could not recollect where. This evening I took a Hebrew Bible, and I fancied I had in my mind a passage wherein it

was made use of, and in a very little time found it in Proverbs xxxi. 2: "What my son? and what the son of my womb? and what the son of my vows?" Every word *son* is here in the text *bar*. I have cited the text as it is in the English Bible, though I think the word here rendered *what* ought to be *wherefore*. However, this is nothing to the present purpose. I shall, notwithstanding, observe to you that the text from Daniel, which I have transcribed, is also from the same version. I have this evening looked over that also in the original, where I think there might be made some amendments in the translation. If, on farther scrutiny, it appears in a clearer light than what the present version shows it, it may afford me an opportunity of giving it to you in the light it may appear to me. It is now past eleven o'clock at night, so must conclude, &c.

AN ABSTRACT

FROM CHIZZUK HA-EMUNAH, IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND

THIS author, after having pointed out several passages in the law and prophets, which plainly speak of this present general dispersion of Israel and their redemption therefrom, as well as the destruction of the Fourth or Roman Empire, proceeds to show, from several prophecies relating to the restoration of Israel, and the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah (which being all unaccomplished,) that the

Messiah cannot be already come, but is yet to be expected, viz. :

First. The gathering together of the ten tribes and their union with the tribe of Judah, in which Benjamin is included, and their being subject to one king, who is to be of the seed of David; the prophets calling that prince, "David, my servant." (Ezek. xxxvii. 16, to end.)

Secondly. The invasion of Gog and Magog, and their overthrow in the land of Israel. (Ezek. xxxviii. 39.) The same thing is alluded to in Zech. xiv. 12; and Isaiah lxvi. 19, seems to have reference to the same subject.

Thirdly. The dividing the Mount of Olives in a most extraordinary manner. (Zech. xiv. 4 and 5.)

Fourthly. The destroying of the tongue of the Egyptian Sea; the smiting of the river into seven streams, and causing a highway for the remnant of his people as it was to Israel, when he came out of Egypt. All these things were to happen, when the Messiah shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. (Isaiah xi. 12, to the end.)

Fifthly. The flowing of living waters from Jerusalem out of the sanctuary, &c. (Ezek. xxxvi. 1 to the end of 12, and Zech. xiv. 8.)

Sixthly. That ten men from all the different nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, &c. (Zech. viii. 23.)

Seventhly. The going up of the remnants of all the nations, which came up against Jerusalem, to worship the King, the LORD of Hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (Zech. xiv. 16.)

Eighthly. The universal observance of the new moons

and Sabbaths, for the times appointed for coming to worship before the LORD. (Isaiah lxvi. 23.)

Ninthly. The extirpation of idolatry, and even the memory thereof; together with the false prophets and unclean spirits, from the earth, as appears from Zech. xiii. 2, Isaiah ii. 18; and confusion and shame are denounced against idol worship. (Isaiah xlii., and Psalm xcvi. 7.)

Tenthly. That the divine law (to wit: that law which God gave unto Israel by the hands of his servant Moses) should obtain throughout all the world, and one faith universally prevail. (Isaiah xlv. 11, &c., and 23; Ibid. lii. 1, &c.; Ibid. lxvi. 17, &c.; Zech. ix. 7; Ibid. xiv. 9.)

Eleventhly. That one general dominion or universal monarchy, that is, the kingdom of Israel, which Daniel, ch. vii. v. 27, calls the holy ones of the Most High, should obtain without ever failing. (Numbers xxiv. 17; Isaiah xlix. 23; Ibid. lx. 11; Daniel, in the place above cited.)

Twelfthly. That after the war of Gog and Magog, universal peace should obtain throughout the world, and mankind should have no farther use or occasion for weapons of war, &c. (Isaiah ii. 4; Hosea ii. 18; Zech. ix. 10.)

Thirteenthly. That in the land of Israel, the beasts of prey should cease to be so, and live quietly with the tame cattle, and not hurt one another, much less mankind; that even the most noxious reptiles should become entirely inoffensive. (Isaiah xi. 6; Ibid. lxiv. 25; Ezek. xxxiv. 25 and 28; Hosea ii. 18.)

Fourteenthly. That there will be, in a great measure, an end of iniquity and sin; but in an especial manner among the people of Israel. (Deut. xxx. 6; Isaiah lx. 21; Jer. iii. 17; Ibid. l. 20; Ezek. xxxvi. 25; Ibid. xxxvii. 23; Zephan. iii. 13.)

Fifteenthly. That all distress, anguish, and sorrow shall be no more in the land of Israel; but the people of God, the seed of Jacob, shall inherit that land, and long enjoy virtuous and happy lives. (Isaiah lxxv. 9, 14, &c., to the end.)

Sixteenthly. The glorious return of the Divine Presence to Israel, as in the days of old, when prophecy and wisdom shall abound in Israel. (Ezek. xxxvii. 26, to the end.)

Seventeenthly. The coming of Elijah the Prophet, which is to precede the great day of the LORD. (Malachi iv. 5.)

Eighteenthly. The building of the future temple, according to its figure, dimensions, and order, &c., as described in Ezek. xl. to xlv.

Nineteenthly. The division of the land, for the inheritance of the twelve tribes of Israel, according to the portion of each tribe. (Ezek. xlvii. 13, to the end of the book.)

Twentiethly. The resurrection of the dead, at least of some particulars. (Deut. xxxii. 39; Isaiah xxvi. 19; Daniel xii. 2.)

These, and many more prophecies of the same import, being yet unaccomplished, are, all of them, still to be fulfilled; and, thereby prove that the Messiah described by the prophets, whose coming we await, is not already come, but is yet to be expected with certainty.

The author, after the foregoing proofs, adds: If these appear insufficient, you have yet farther evidence in the Book of Daniel. The place referred to is chap. ii. v. 31 to 45. I shall not here confine myself to a translation, but follow the hints he has given me in the interpretation of the text, which I shall, in the first place, transcribe, that you may have it before you, whereby you may more easily judge how the explication accords with it.

“ Daniel, chap. ii. v. 31. Thou, oh King, sawest and behold a great image : this great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee, and the form thereof was terrible.

“ 32. This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and thighs of brass.

“ 33. His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

“ 34. Thou sawest, till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet, that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.

“ 35. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer’s thrashing-floors ; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them ; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

“ 36. This is the dream ; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.

“ 37. Thou, oh King, art a king of kings ; for the God of Heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.

“ 38. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hands, and made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

“ 39. And after thee shall rise another kingdom, inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

“ 40. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron ; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things,

and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

“41. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potter’s clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of iron; forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay.

“42. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken.

“43. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

“44. And in the days of those kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to another; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms; and it shall stand for ever.

“45. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

The image here described consisted of five parts, of as many different materials, viz: the gold, the silver, the brass, the iron, and the iron and clay; indicating four great empires, which were, respectively, to have almost universal dominion,—so far, at least, as to have no rivals in power when at the summit of their greatness. Each of these, in their turn, had dominion over the people of God. It is

generally agreed that the gold was descriptive of the Babylonian empire, the silver, the Persian, the brass, the Grecian, and the iron, the Roman. The prophet allots to the fourth monarchy two parts of the five,—the iron alone, and the iron and the clay. He declares, also, that the destruction of the image is to begin by being smitten on the feet, composed of the iron and the clay. The power which is to effect this is the kingdom which the God of Heaven is then to set up. That is the kingdom of the people of the saints of the Most High (Dan. vii. 27), or the kingdom of Israel, who are called the Holy People, as will appear by the texts hereto annexed. This universal empire,—the kingdom of the Messiah,—was to destroy the image by smitting it on the feet of iron and clay. This is a circumstance very worthy of notice;—for, the fourth monarchy, in its greatest strength, is described as consisting of iron only. This was the state of the Roman empire until its decay. This, then, was not the time of the kingdom of the Messiah.

The fourth monarchy, in its first state of iron, is well enough understood; but in its state of iron and clay it is not so clear. I sometime was inclined to think that the German empire, which yet retains the name, and, in some respects, something of the form of the Roman empire, though weakened and divided, to be meant by the iron and clay. It is in this particular that this author has hinted to me something that I had not before thought of. From the time of Daniel, the world was to have four principal Gentile monarchies, the fourth, by much the most potent, as well as most extended, and, while in the iron state, was in possession of almost all Europe, a great part of Asia, together with Egypt, and most of the coast of Africa bordering on

the Mediterranean. The several nations inhabiting this very extended dominion were all parts of the fourth monarchy in its connected state of iron, or strength. During the greater part of this period of the Roman empire, they patronized the religions of all the parts of their empire; and there was little or no distinction made on that head. Before the decay of the empire, Christianity made its appearance. This, by its increase, became obnoxious to the government for some time, and that only occasionally. But, before the total subversion of the empire in its iron state, it became the religion of the court. Whether the state of the iron and clay may be said to commence at the dividing of the empire into the Western and Eastern, or not, I will not undertake to say. However, the empire now became weaker every day, and was dismembered. In this condition of the empire it was that Mahomedanism made its appearance in the world, and in a little time became possessed of all the Roman provinces of Asia and Africa, and at last got possession of the eastern, and, indeed, at that time, it may be said in some measure, the sole capital of the empire. At this time, if not before, it may be said with propriety that the fourth monarchy became iron and clay. Our author supposes that the Christian and Mohomedan nations, which were the component parts of the ancient Roman empire, are now the same fourth monarchy in its debilitated state of iron and clay. The iron and the clay, being so contrary to each other as not to incorporate, though blended together, indicates, as he thinks, the Roman Christian and the Roman Mahomedan parts of the empire, which, though intermixed in regard to habitations and dominions, yet do not intermarry, but remain separate, and hold each other in contempt. It is during

this divided and weak state of the fourth monarchy, and not before, that the fifth monarchy,—the kingdom of the Messiah,—which is in no wise included in the image, is to reduce the iron and clay, as well as the other component parts of the image, or, in other words, the several kingdoms, nations, and people, which either are or were the component parts of the several monarchies included in the image, and that in such manner as no traces of those monarchies will afterwards remain, as well as to establish and extend the kingdom of God over all the world: when the knowledge of God, with universal righteousness and charity, shall prevail throughout the whole world. Then shall the Lord be One, and his name One; which God grant speedily. Amen.

The texts referred to above, proving the Israelites to be called the Holy People, are the following, besides others that may be omitted, viz: Exod. xix. 6; *ibid.* xxii. 31; Deut. vii. 6; *ibid.* xiv. 1; Isaiah lxii. 12; *ibid.* lxiii. 18; Jer. ii. 3; Daniel (before cited) vii.; *ibid.* xii. 7, and to the end. The several passages produced by the author in proof of the expected restoration of Israel speak very plainly for that wished-for event under the government of the Messiah, as well as for the reduction of all nations under that happy dominion,—so plainly, as the author observes, that any one that attends to the import and meaning of these predictions cannot, without doing violence to his understanding, deny his assent to the foregoing propositions.*

* Alluding to the propositions he had advanced in his book.



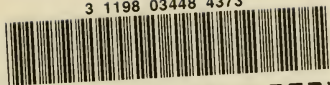


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